



Politics, Social Change and the Church in Nigeria

Acts of SIST International Missiological Symposium

BL2462.5
.S57
2007x
Spiritan
Coll.

Edited by
Bona, Ikenna Ugwu, CSSp

SPIRITAN COLLECTION
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
The Gumberg Library



*Congregation of the Holy Spirit
USA Eastern Province*

Copyright (C) 2007 by
International Society for
the Study of Missions

International Institute for
the Study of Missions
Geneva, Switzerland

POLITICS, SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

**Acts of the 12th SIST International Missiological
Symposium, 2007**

Dr Charles,
Thanks so much for
visiting SISI
J. B. Wadsworth
Nov 05, 2011

**Acts of the 12th SIST International Missiological
Symposium, 2007**

BL2462.5

S57

2007x

SPIRITAN

COLL.

0760312849

Edited by

Rev Fr Dr Bona. Ikenna Ugwu, CSSp

**Copyright (C) Spiritan International School of Theology,
Attakwu, Enugu**

First Published 2011

All Rights Reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the permission of Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu who is the copyright owner.

ISBN:978-978-8433-20-0

Cover Design - Kingsley's

Published & Printed by

KINGSLEY'S

15 Monrovia Street New Haven, Enugu

08037512771, 08051802551

kingsleyakenobo@yahoo.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	General Introduction	v
One:	A welcome Address	1
Two:	Keynote Address	5
Three:	Fully Catholic, Fully Political: <i>Exploring the Biblical Grounds for active Christian participation in politics</i>	15
Four:	Factors that Militate against the active involvement of Christians in politics and societal transformation in Nigeria	16
Five:	The Church and the State in Nigeria: <i>Partners in Dialogue towards a better Nation</i>	75
Six:	Elections or Selection, Ethnic and Money Politics in Nigeria: <i>Lessons from the past towards a better tomorrow</i>	101
Seven:	Art, Media and Literature as Catalyst of Socio-Political Change: <i>The Nigerian Experience and the role of the Church</i>	119
Eight:	The Church as an Alternative Society: <i>A Critical Examination of Ecclesiastical Structures, Leadership and Prophetic witness in Nigeria today</i>	137
Nine:	Diocesan Justice and Peace Departments and their Contributions as agents of Conscientization, Education and Motivation of Christians for Political Responsibility and other Civic Duties	183
	Communiqué	199
	Contributors	203
	Symposium Co-ordinators	206

General Introduction

Experience shows that the human person is not only rational, social and religious but also political. Politics and the political system are so important to life that nobody and no society could ignore them and still look forward to survival or to any meaningful transformation. Nigeria, as a political system, was born in 1960 when she gained Independence from the British but ever since then, her politics has been characterized by instability, ethnicity, constant violence, corruption, and lack of a sense of direction. In fact, the greater part of the years of the political existence of the nation has been dominated by military dictatorship.

In 1999, the military handed over rule to a democratically elected government in Nigeria and many people heaved a great sigh of relief because the age of dictatorship was considered to be over. The Giant of Africa, Nigeria, started to experience democracy again and this was greeted with high expectations of a speedy positive societal change. Unfortunately, the road to realizing the dreams of democracy appears to be strewn with a lot of thorns and potholes. Elections fall short of acceptable standards because they are characterized by violence, killings and rigging. Men and women who are placed in positions of power and authority tend to work for themselves and against the people whom they are elected to serve. Basic amenities which governments provide for their citizens such as security of lives and property, health facilities, good roads, water and electricity are not simply unevenly distributed but very hard to find in Nigeria. Unemployment is at its highest point and as such crime rate increases every day. In the face of these, the masses are disillusioned particularly about politics and the life-giving changes it is supposed to bring to the society. Sometimes, it appears that the country is moving towards a total collapse; yet, something holds it together. Thanks to God, there are many people who work and fight to keep the nation together and to see that it grows to be an integrally developed nation.

The 2007 general election was to be a litmus test for the infant democracy in the country. Going by historical evidence, a transfer of power from one civilian government to another has been a very difficult task for Nigeria as a nation. Politicians needed to restore the hope of the populace in the political system particularly as regards voting and

elections. All hands needed to be on deck to see that this project was successfully carried out without tinkering with the unity and sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The Catholic Church, particularly as evidenced in her faith and social teachings, lays serious emphasis on the need for all Christians to be actively involved in all matters pertaining to the authentic development of the human society. The belief that politics is dirty is not Catholic. In fact, the Church believes and preaches a God who, because of his supreme love for the world, did not hesitate to assume the nature of a human being with all its limitations and depravities. God, through his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, immersed himself in the world without reserve and thus, he did not only save the world but exalted it. This is the model which the Catholic Church presents to her members as example of their relationship with the world — a model of total immersion and involvement in the affairs of the world at the cost of extreme sacrifices.

Notwithstanding the ecclesial principles and models of active participation in politics, what obtains in practical life appears to be the contrary. Many Catholics are very reluctant getting actively involved in politics because they consider it dirty and very risky both for their existence here on earth and their eternal salvation. In politics, they fear the loss of their earthly life and possibly, their eternal salvation. Thus, apathy, aloofness and total neglect characterize the attitude and behaviour of a good number of Catholics in relation to partisan politics.

Right from its inception, our establishment, Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST) Attakwu, Enugu, a Catholic seminary and an Institute of both Religion and Theology, has played a very significant role in contributing positively to the transformation of the nations of Africa and their people as well. Its motto is *Evangelizare pauperibus*, "Evangelizing the Poor", and she understands this to mean being at the service of the people, the Church and the State in their needs. The Missiological Symposium which we organise every other year proves to be one of the ways through which this Institution fulfils this objective. Considering the challenges posed today by politics in most African countries particularly Nigeria, "Politics, Social Change and the Church in Nigeria" was chosen as the theme for our 12th Missiological Symposium which took place from March 21 to 24, 2007. The major

goal of the Symposium was to provide an environment for communal reflections, debates and discussions on this theme and that really happened. Moreover, there was room to discuss the question of the negative attitudes of many Catholics to politics which tends to designate the political system as a zone for only the non-fully committed Christians.

Erudite scholars, highly respected clergymen, seasoned politicians and committed Christian believers from different parts of Nigeria and beyond, gathered at SIST to rob minds together on politics, social change, and the Church. We were glad to have at the symposium such dignitaries as His Excellency Most Rev. Dr. John Ifeanyichukwu Okoye (the Catholic Bishop of Awgu), His Excellency Commodore Amadi Guy Ikwechegh (former Governor of Imo State, now late) and his First Lady, Barrister Nwamaka Ikwechegh, Prof Pat Utomi (Presidential Aspirant during the 2007 election), John Nnia Nwodo (former Minister of Information), and a highly powered delegation of the Catholic Women and Catholic Men Organizations of Mater Misericordiae Parish, Rumuomasi, Port Harcourt. All these men and women were united with other participants in the conviction that by articulating visions and drawing road maps, the Symposium would contribute in no small way to the integral development of both society and the political system in Nigeria. To a great extent, the Symposium should be considered not only a success but one of the great gestures of solidarity on the part of our Institute with the larger ecclesial family in Nigeria in her continuous effort towards the authentic transformation of the human society.

This publication contains the presentations and communiqués of the Symposium. The presentation opens with two powerful addresses: the Welcome Address by the Rector of the School, Very Rev Fr Dr Greg Olikenyi, CSSp, and the Keynote Address by Rev Fr Dr Matthew Kukah. The first major paper is delivered by Rev Fr Dr Munachi Ernest Ezeogu on the biblical grounds for active Christian participation in politics. According to him, one can be fully Catholic and fully political at the same time. Following this immediately is the examination of the factors that militate against the active involvement of Christians in politics and social transformation by Fr Ugwu. The complexities of the relationship between the state and the Church are presented by Fr Njoku. John Nnia Nwodo Jnr undertakes the task of a historical survey of politics in Nigeria from before Independence till date. On the strength of

this survey, he notes that corruption, unbridled rivalry and greed combine to make our elections more of selections. Dr Bridget Nwanze x-rays the vital roles which art, media and literature play in social transformation and political reforms. Fr John Odey examines ecclesiastical structures, leadership and the lives of Christians with a view to certifying the Church worthy or unworthy of offering Nigeria an alternative way of governance. Finally, Fr Ikechukwu Ani uses the mission and activities of the Justice and Peace Department in Enugu Diocese (CIDJAP) to show a concrete example of how the Church is making contributions to societal transformation in the contemporary Nigeria.

The publication of these proceedings was delayed by certain factors which were not unconnected to politics. We delighted that we have ultimately succeeded in doing surmounting the obstacles. Fortunately, this publication is coming out at a time when politics is on the air again; the whole climate in the country is fully charged with the political currents because the April 2011 general election is around the corner. The principles outlined, the suggestions made, and challenges identified in this work would assist us to understand and respond effectively to the present situations and problems in Nigeria.

Our profound gratitude goes to all those who made different contributions towards the success of the symposium. The Rector, the staff and students of our Institute all worked tirelessly to see the goals of the event realized. In a very special way the Symposium Coordinating committee, made up of Fr. Dr. Bede Ukwuije C.S.Sp, Fr. Philip Igbo, Cmf, Sr. Dr. Mary Sylvia Nwachukwu D.D.L and Fr. Dr. Bona. Ugwu, C.S.Sp, deserves a pat on the back for the wonderful job it did. All our paper presenters turned up and made awesome presentations. To all these we are highly indebted. Friends and well-wishers who supported us financially are remembered, appreciated and prayed for. As we present you with the insights and ideas of the Symposium, we look forward to seeing them appropriated and applied to life for the transformation of our country Nigeria and other nations in Africa.

Rev. Fr. Dr. Bona. Ikenna Ugwu, C.S.Sp.
2007 Symposium Coordinator

ONE

A Welcome Address

By the Rector,
Rev. Fr. Dr. Greg Olikenyi, CSSp

His Lordship, the Catholic Bishop of Awgu Diocese,
Most Rev. Dr. John Okoye,
Dear Friends,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my joy and privilege to welcome you all, on behalf of the staff and students of Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), Attakwu, to our 12th Missiological Symposium. We are really very grateful to you for honouring our invitation.

SIST, as some of you know, is a Catholic Theological Institute established to train priests and offer theological formation to religious and lay people for the purpose of promoting the welfare of human beings in the world, particularly in the African societies. In its theological orientation, it constantly addresses contextual issues that affect human growth and happiness. In this way, SIST shares in the task of the Church which is founded on the concern of God of Jesus Christ – a concern that focuses on the total well-being of all, especially the poor and the needy who are affected directly or indirectly by their human situations or contexts.

Here in Nigeria, the time of elections is fast approaching, and many Nigerians are not only confused about what they should do but also worried about the outcome. A lot of people are very ignorant of the dynamics of politics and many of those who were elected-as leaders – in the past by the people have been a disappointment and proved incompetent. Instead of working for the common good of the people whom they are supposed to represent and serve, these leaders turned to oppress the people

through bad governance. Indeed, many people – especially the poor – have been led to the verge of despair by acts of bad governance resulting in the crazy pursuit of self-enrichment through corruption and embezzlement by those leaders and their sponsors rather than the public interest of the people.

But where does the problem actually lie? I do not intend to deal with this question in this address, but I strongly believe that the element of God and morality is lacking in our public life. It seems to me that although we all go to Church or Mosques or Shrine, we have been governed in corruption and immorality, without conscience and without God. The negative consequences of this are not difficult to be seen in the lives of many today especially the poor. Because, “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time...are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well” (cf. Vat. II, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 1), SIST finds it imperative to create an open forum like this symposium to discuss this contextual issue. It is hoped that through our discussion people are conscientised on the ideals of social justice and other values that promote the common good and welfare of everyone. Consequently, a social change can be brought about.

Through this encounter, therefore, SIST, as an important organ of the Church, is not only fulfilling its prophetic role but also rendering a crucial service to the Church and humanity. We have always committed ourselves to his call/service and we shall endeavor to remain faithful to it. At this juncture, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported us in different ways that our dream to host this symposium has become a reality. Without such a support, the burden of hosting a symposium like this one would have been extremely difficult to cope with.

Many of us may not know that SIST is not a money-making establishment. In order to run its activities and accomplish its

projects, it relies on the generosity of its friends and well-wishers. The installation of street-lights along our avenue right now is being sponsored by a few friends to whom we are very indebted. This is to enhance our security and environment. We have some other pressing projects for which we are seriously looking for sponsors: buying of a thirty-seater bus, tarring of our road especially the school avenue and construction of a new kitchen. It will be a thing of great joy for us if we find sponsors or contributors to any of the projects among you.

Part of the main thrust of SIST's vision is showing of hospitality to guests. So it is our wish to sincerely welcome you to SIST. We do this not only verbally but also concretely. I therefore present to you Igbo kola-nut as a symbol of our hospitality in respect of the Igbo culture and context in which we find ourselves. I also present to you a cake in recognition of the international character of this establishment. With these symbolic elements, I invite you to share in our lives – our joys and concerns. And like the Igbo's say: one wetware obi, wetware nude. So, we symbolically offer you our lives to which you are invited to share.

I do hope that this symposium will empower all of us (and a great number of Nigerians) to change our (their) attitudes positively and make right choices in the forthcoming elections in order to make Nigeria a better place where justice, peace, equity, love and happiness reign.

Once again, welcome to SIST!

Rev. Fr. Dr. Greg Olikenyi, C.S.Sp
(Rector)

TWO

Keynote Address

By Rev Fr. Dr. Hasan Kukah

It will be considered a mortal sin by the Nigerian elite for any citizen to be found speaking out openly or secretly about the greatness of our country. One would be laughed out of the market place of ideas were one to hazard a proposition that somehow, things are not so bad in our country and that we are making some progress in many departments of our individual, community and national life. To say that many of our politicians are trying, or that we need to be a bit more patient and discerning, that we need to be more appreciative of the context and content of the debates about our nation, is to court both physical opprobrium and also risk social isolation. To attempt to say in a public place that President Obasanjo has tried, that some Governors have done well, or that a significant number of the members of the National Assembly have tried in a lot of areas, or that Professor Maurice Iwu is trying to do his best; you would be thrown out of a bus or be called a turn coat, one who has been bought by the powers that be.

I do not in any way deny the presence of enough evidence to justify claims that we are too far from the goals we set for ourselves. My main worry is how and why nation that is so intensely divided on most things would find unity and harmony on the lachrymal themes of the failure of our national life especially when the worst offenders are the most vocal. Does our united voice against Nigeria suggest accuracy of our beliefs or does it merely show a sign of intellectual surrender to the fine principles of the scholar and analyst as a contrarian? If as it is, we have all come to believe that we are doing so badly, are there other nations that we would like to be like? Nigerians have come to believe that things are working everywhere else except in their nation. If we view the issue of things working from the point of view of the availability of steady supply of energy, water,

infrastructure and so on, then may be we are right. The critical question we might therefore need to pay attention to may also include the need to question what forces have shaped change in other nations.

Nigerians are quick to praise a Rawlings to high heavens, but today, the man is an outsider in his own country. He was not even at the 50th anniversary of Ghana. We cherish the Americans and the British over their democracy and how organized they are, but whom shall we colonise or enslave to be like them? So, are we here faced with the dilemma that far away hills always look greener? In other words, how might we begin to think more clearly and creatively about the issues of democracy and nation building in a society that has been so severely wounded internally and externally? I love history and I am currently reading a fascinating book that looks at where Africa has come from in the last 50 years. Thanks to Oputa Panel, I have had reason to look more closely at the stories of Oputa Panels in other parts of the world by way of international interactions with scholars from around the world with similar stories to tell. I realize what Tolstoy meant when he said that: All unhappy families are unhappy differently.

You have chosen to reflect on the theme of the Church, Politics and Social Change. It is predictable that this Conference will conclude that taking everything else into consideration, for Nigeria, the beautiful ones are not yet born. We shall also hear stories of how even the Churches have not done much in shaping social change in Nigeria. We will all rehearse the familiar stories about our failed politics and how all politicians are rascals, thieves, looters, scoundrels and so on. Those who know well will say the solution lies in organising free and fair elections, ensuring due process and ensuring that the right candidates win. They will also say that our people should vote for God fearing, credible, patriotic and selfless Nigerians. Blah, Blah, Blah.

I have carefully looked at the flier for your Symposium and I commend the organizers for the scope of issues you have set out to examine. Gladly, I see that there is no section or subsection devoted to examining how we might get rid of all the foreign aliens from outer space or those Ghanaians, Togolese, French or Germans who have connived to destroy or frustrate the birth of the beautiful ones in Nigeria. Implicitly, we acknowledge that it is we Nigerians and no one else who is responsible for the mess we have created in our nation. This is why this interrogation should not deteriorate to saying the things that make the people happy but examining seriously, the nature of the challenges of nation building in a globalised world. There are no short cuts. We cannot worship Nelson Mandela while rejecting the prison, the principles, the patriotism that he symbolizes. We like the omelet but we do not want to break any eggs.

No nation has found a short cut to national cohesion and greatness. If you have a fractured leg, does it matter if the patient is an Indian, Japanese, French, Austrian, South African or Nigerian? Does it matter if he or she is Igbo, Tiv, Ikulu, Yoruba or Kanuri? A fractured leg is a fractured leg. All the legs in question will either heal or rut differently depending on an aggregate of forces: scope of the fracture, type of fracture, time that we got to the Doctor, quality of treatment or facilities, age of the patient, experience of the doctors and nurses, discipline of the patient in keeping to the regime of treatment and so on. Some might heal quicker than others. I make this point to draw attention to the fact that in studying how nations develop or fail to develop, so many forces come into play. There are no short cuts, the routes may differ and the speed of arrival at the terminus point will vary, but the essence remains the same: we need patience, focus and sacrifice. No two nations come to the terminus point in the same way. And indeed, there is really no such thing as a terminus point. I think that this is what is essentially missing in our debate about our country. We ignore the historical context and content of our nation's history at our own peril.

Many people have argued that we have no excuse for not progressing. And they may be right. We are told that other nations were colonized too, and that the Asian Tigers have since done better than us (recall the now embarrassing apocryphal about palm trees and palm oil from Benin). It may be plausible to say that the so called Asian Tigers have done well, but how do we explain the fact that Lee Kwan Yew was in power for some 40 years, organizing and winning elections consistently. Mohammed Mahathir was Prime Minister of Malaysia, organising and winning elections till he quit after almost thirty years. Castro has been going on for nearly 50 years, as well as Gaddafi and so on. Were they practicing democracy in the sense we understand it now? I make this case to underscore the fact that we must appreciate where we are in terms of time, culture and public expectations. Those who wanted President Obasanjo to have a third term based their convictions on the experiences of the Asian Tigers. Nigerians rightly rejected third term because they love democracy. Sadly, Nigerian scholars have not paid attention to the real theoretical context of this debate which is, can a nation democratize and develop at the same time, and with what speed? This is food for another day. Furthermore, Nigerian scholars have not paid attention to the deleterious impact of military rule and the extent to which this has impacted on our political conduct today.

In his book; *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, Dr Ian Bremmer, an American scholar provides a template for addressing the kind of issues I am trying to flag off. The J Curve theory is based on an idea of a graph in which the vertical axis is a measure of stability while a horizontal axis is a measure of political and economic openness to the outside world. Stability is defined here as a nation's capacity to contain shocks. Thus, the author argues that a stable nation does not generate shocks; rather, it has shock absorbers. Compare driving a car with good shock absorbers especially on a bumpy road and you get the message. Ironically, the author argues that what he calls, closed societies or dictatorships, are more stable than open/democratic

societies. While open societies like those that make up the G8 depend on Institutions for their stability, closed societies depend on Individuals (Abacha, Idi Amin, Mobutu, Kim II Sung, Botha or Mugabe). All societies have levels of stability ranging from High, Moderate or Low stability. Then there are those with no stability or failed states. If asked where Nigeria is, I believe most cynics will say we are a failed state. But Bremmer, who appreciates the issues more than we ourselves classifies us as a low stability state.

If we accept this diagnosis, the next question then is, how should our nation negotiate its way towards positive change and how might the Churches shape these outcomes? It is to this that I will now turn our attention.

First of all, are we democratizing? Most debates about the future of our country tend to focus on rather simplistic clichés derived from repetition. In their frustrations, Nigerians talk about how much their leaders have failed them, they talk about the fact that what we are practising is not true democracy and that the solutions to our problems is to practice true federalism. There are cries of marginalization from disparate ethno-religious entrepreneurs, there are fears that elections are not transparent, that the system is corrupt and the grounds hostile to democratic principles. The field is open.

It is an illusion to continue to argue that Catholics/Christians might necessarily make better politicians. Politics is a game and like all games, it has its rules. If the experiences of Ireland, Italy, Spain, Portugal or other Catholic countries is anything to go by, we must move away from this fallacy unless we can speak of a Catholic way of playing football or volley or any sport for that matter. I say this to provoke you to greater thoughts about our roles in shaping the politics of our nation. The roles of Franco in Spain or Bulusconi in Italy, Allende in Chile and their so called Catholic credentials should give us food for thought. There is no

single Political Party in Nigeria where anyone is representing the Catholic Church. People may be Catholics but they have been chosen to represent their people at other levels. We need to think through the implications of the endless identity mutations in our nation and their impact.

The role of the military remains under studied in Nigerian politics and we ~~do~~ so at our own risk. Today civilians are a minority class in a ~~so~~ called civilian democracy. Umaru Yaradua may not be where he is in the Presidential race were his elder brother not an influential soldier before him! The role and place of Women in our political life remains controversial largely due to the forces of conservative traditions of patriarchy and religion. But, we ignore women at our own peril. Their sheer numbers, expertise, energy, resilience, talent, decorum, influence, stability, proficiency all show that it is our society that will be diminished in future. It is better for us to make peace with women now before their sheer anger and frustration turns them into an earthquake.

The role and place of Money in politics remains a source of worry. But we have not framed the issues well. It costs money to do everything in life from feeding to preaching the word of God. What is most critical is how by legislation and education, we can create a good climate. It will always be expensive to seek public office. The politicians have been vilified and the people presented as victims, but in reality, I think the people are even more corrupt in their demands than the politicians. We can debate this.

The role and place of Religion and Ethnicity will remain controversial. But denial that they are potent and that they matter is even more dangerous. The story of Rwanda is the ugly side of those who try to hide their heads from dealing with this problem. The story of South Africa and its Rainbow coalition is a story of lessons in pluralism and democracy.

We have a long road to travel as a nation. The major role of the

Church is to seek to escape conscription by the various elite classes whether they pose as religious saviours or ethnic warriors. As a Church but more importantly as priests and religious, we must run from the traps that make us talk of my people in the narrow sense of group interests. See how we reacted to the provisional results of the national census. Various ethnic groups have alleged fraud, fallen on the dubious sword laid by conspiracy theorists. Now we hear that the decision to keep ethnicity and religion out was simply to further alienate certain groups whether we pose as tribe or faith. There have been claims of undercounting, and the we have returned to the regional laagers and a few fallacies. I am as much a lay man as many of us are. But in truth, what were the issues in the last census? First; the results are provisional and secondly, it was a census of Nigerians not Nigerian tribes or religionists. Important as these identities are, should they get in the way of trying to find out how many Nigerians there are? Is it more important to know how many people we are cooking for or how many Hausas, Igbos, Christians, Muslims or Buddhists we are having for lunch or dinner?

In the arguments over numbers, there has been confusion over the roles of population to population density, land mass, location and so on. But how do the issues shape up? Let me attempt the issues as I have reflected on them and listened to the experts.

First of all, population density is the average number of people per square kilometer and it is a measurement of how sparsely or densely populated any particular geographical locality, country, or community may be. This should not be mistaken for a nation or a community's total population since you must add land mass in the calculation. Population density is a total population divided by total land area or total population is population density multiplied by total land area. For the purpose of analysis, population density does not necessarily translate into higher population in any given two or more localities.

Many Nigerian communities have been claiming that simply because population densities are associated with their localities or coastal areas, therefore their communities must be the most populous. Those who hold this view forget some of the internal dynamics such as land mass and the spread of their communities. If population density were the yard stick for determining population spread, then of all places in the world, Monaco would be the most populous part of the world since it is the most densely populated country the whole world. For, although Monaco has a population density of 23, 600 people per square kilometer, yet its land mass is only 1.49 square kilometers while its total population is 35, 233. It therefore holds the population for being the smallest country in the whole world. Monaco is not alone. Other densely populated areas include Singapore (6, 208: 4.48m), Macau (17, 699: 460, 162), Hong Kong (16, 407: 7.04m). Furthermore, while Taiwan has a population density of 636 persons per square kilometer, why should it not expect to be more populated than China which posts a mere 137 persons per square kilometer yet has a population of 1.315b persons?

In Africa, Rwanda is the most densely populated country with its 343 persons per square kilometer, while its population is 9 million. Should we not expect Rwanda to be the most populated nation in Africa? In such nations like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kivu is one of the most densely populated areas yet, it is a few thousand miles away from the coast. Many other countries in Africa or Europe post the same results from Germany, France, to Italy. In both India and Pakistan, such areas like the Punjab and Assam are far away from the coast, yet they also post some of the most astonishingly high population figures.

We still have a volatile polity and our politicians are still learning. See the endless impeachments which have all been motivated by pecuniary incentives than anything else. Let us see how even the United States, the fathers of democracy have handled the issues of

impeachments.

The first President ever to be impeached in the history of the United States, was President Andrew Jackson, the 17th President (1865-1869). He took over office after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. It took 129 years before an attempt was made to impeach an American President. This happened when on December 19th, 1998 the House of Representatives impeached President Clinton on two charges. The charges, flowing from the Monica Lewinsky scandal were for Perjury and Obstruction of Justice. In the House of Representatives, the votes were as follows: Perjury (votes were 228:206) and on Obstruction of justice (votes were 221-212). The matter went to the Senate where it was debated from January 7th-February 12th, 1999. The Senate required a majority of 67 votes to impeach the President on the two counts.

However, both charges were defeated with the result as follows: On charges of Perjury (45:55) and Obstruction of Justice (50:50). Some people wrongly assume that the late President Richard Nixon was impeached. On the contrary, he was not. Rather, although the lower House had impeached him and the Senate was all set to do so, President Nixon resigned before the Senate could hear the case. It is important to note for the records that in both cases of Presidents Jackson and Clinton, they were later acquitted by the Senate while Nixon was pardoned by his successor. So, impeachments are not to be taken lightly.

In conclusion, nation building can be a bloody experience. But so also is childbirth. It was Patrick Buchanan, the Republican politician who in his book, State of Emergency noted that: A nation is organic, a nation is alive, a nation has a beating heart. A Constitution does not create a nation. A nation writes a Constitution that is already the birth certificate of the nation already born in the hearts of its people Patriotism is the soul of a nation. It is what keeps a nation alive. When patriotism dies, when

a nation loses the love and loyalty of its people, the nation dies and begins to decompose. As disciples of Christ, our challenge is to light the candle of hope to heal and bring succour to our society broken by fear, suspicion, anxiety and fatalism. We are children of the Resurrection and our message is, a new world is here for us to not just to be behold; but to help to build. If we do not face the challenge, we shall be condemned as guilty bystanders! Thank you very much.

THREE

Fully Catholic, Fully Political: Exploring The Biblical Grounds For Active Christian Participation In Politics

By Rev. Fr. Dr Ernest Munachi Ezeogu, C.S.Sp, LSS, PhD

1. INTRODUCTION

On January 14, 2007, a milestone was set in the history of political consciousness in the Nigerian Catholic church. On that day, in the Catholic diocese of Nsukka, an episcopal directive was read in all the parishes enjoining on all Catholics to produce their voter's registration card by February 7 or be banished from the sacraments. This injunction places the civic duties of Catholics in the diocese on the same level as the Ten Commandments of God. In fact, it can be argued that this injunction places the civic duty to participate in the political process above the Ten Commandments, since failure to keep one of the Ten Commandments does not always incur total banishment from the sacraments.

This development is significant in that it signals a more widespread dissatisfaction in the Nigerian Catholic church with the prevailing paradigm of political involvement. Although it took place only in one diocese out of many, it is indicative that the Nigerian Catholic church is a church in search of a new paradigm of political involvement. In this march toward a new vision of political engagement, the destination is not yet clear. In this, the Catholic Church in Nigeria can be compared to the people of God in exodus: they know the inadequacy of the situation they are leaving behind, the status quo ante, but they are not yet clear as to where they are heading to or the best route to get there.

This seminar on “Politics, Social Change and the Church in Nigeria” is an exercise in collective brainstorming so that together as a thinking and acting church we can more clearly discern the path to a new understanding of our responsibility in the political life of our people. As a contribution to the dialogue, this paper is a critical exploration of our Judaeo-Christian past in so far as it touches on church-state relationship. This survey will be done in light of the biblical tradition that all Christians share. The aim is to propose how Catholics, as individuals and as a group, can make a more meaningful contribution in the political well-being of our people.

a. Why Catholic?

The main title of this study is “Fully Catholic, Fully Political.” You might be wondering why I have chosen to focus this study on Catholics and not on all Christians inclusively. The reason is that, as we shall see later, the various Christian confessions have espoused differing models of political engagement. As a result, even though the different Christian churches and ecclesial communions in Nigeria are asking the same basic question of how to be more politically relevant, they ask it from different starting points.

The Catholic Church, for example, has the singular characteristic of being constituted by members who belong to the different categories of ordained clergy, men and women religious under vows, and the generality of the people of God, the laity. This fact, which is significant in the articulation of a model of political action, is not shared in the same degree by other Christian denominations. Our study takes the situation of the Nigerian Catholic church as a starting point. Members of other Christian communions will, therefore, find this study useful, *mutatis mutandis*. A paraphrase of the words of the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, in presenting the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church says it all.

The essay has been presented in such a way as to be useful not only from within (ab intra), that is among Catholics, but also from outside (ab extra). In fact, those who share the same Baptism with us, as well as the followers of other Religions and all people of good will, can find herein fruitful occasions for reflection and a common motivation toward a more faithful interaction of religion and politics.

b. What Is Politics?

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, a rather experienced body in Catholic political engagement, in 1981 published a document entitled Catechism on the Church and Politics. In this document the conference provided short, pointed answers to some common questions on the church and political engagement. The document begins with the question, "What is politics?" and then goes on to provide the following answer in three parts.

- a. Politics in the widest sense is the dynamic organization of society for the common good. As such it calls for the responsible active participation of all citizens (cf. Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Religious Life and Human Promotion, 1980, no. 12).
- b. Politics may be described as the art of government and public service. Vatican II describes politics as a "difficult and noble art" (GS, 75). Its aim is to realize the purpose of the State.
- c. Politics is also used for partisan politics, the competition to win or retain positions of governmental power. In this last sense clerics and religious are forbidden by church law to be

involved in (partisan) politics.

This definition presents us with certain points worthy of note, namely:

- i. There is an important distinction between partisan and non-partisan politics.
- ii. Responsible active participation in politics is a civic duty for all citizens.
- iii. Politics is a “difficult and noble art.” The noble nature of politics may not be immediately evident to those of us who have experienced the “dirty” politics of Nigeria.
- iv. The aim of politics is to realize the purpose of the State, which is the pursuit of the common good. The common good has been described as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.” (Compendium, 2004. n. 164.)
- v. Clerics and religious are forbidden by church law from active participation in partisan politics. This means that (a) clerics and religious are not forbidden from active participation in non-partisan politics, and (b) there is no law forbidding or even discouraging the laity from active involvement in partisan politics at any level or in any capacity.

c. **Division of Work**

We shall now proceed with the bulk of the work, which will be presented under five headings. First, we shall examine religion and politics in Israelite experience, that is from the beginnings of their theocratic form of government to their subjugation under Roman imperial power, which was the state of affairs at the birth and in the lifetime of Jesus.

Next we shall examine religion and politics in the experience of the early church. Here we shall see the multiplicity of paradigms of political engagement as enshrined in the books of the New Testament. These include the prophetic activism of John the Baptist and the non-violent revolution of Jesus in the gospels, the realpolitik of Paul in the Pauline epistles, and the apocalyptic dualism of John in the book of Revelation.

Then we shall look at religion and politics in Nigerian Catholic experience. Looking into the past we see that Nigerian Catholicism was born at the crossroads of European national Christianities. We take account of the political marginalisation of the Nigerian Catholic Church as a political entity, and the subsequent adoption by Nigerian Catholics of a monastic spirituality of flight from the world as a survival mechanism.

We shall then examine some biblical factors militating against active involvement of Nigerians in politics. We will see that, if the Bible seems to have misled us, the problem is not in the text rightly understood but in the way we have traditionally understood the biblical texts.

Finally, we shall look into the future as we try to fashion a Nigerian Catholic ethic of political engagement. Here we will point out the need for a contextual understanding of the church's social teachings, since they are informed by the political realities of Europe and America, which differ considerably from those of Nigeria and the rest of Africa. Then we will propose three biblical principles for effective Christian political action. Here we will propose practical ways and means to facilitate the involvement of Nigerian Catholic men and women in partisan politics on which our common good as individuals and as a nation largely depends.

2. RELIGION AND POLITICS IN ISRAELITE EXPERIENCE

We shall now examine the interplay of religion and politics in biblical Israel, paying attention to the changing models of political involvement among this ancient people of God. The founding experience of Israel as a nation is the exodus, culminating in the Sinai covenant. The exodus shows God to be a God who is not indifferent to the political plight and nationalistic aspirations of his people. Is the exodus an act of religion or an act of politics? It is definitely both one and the other. Therefore, at the heart of Israel's experience as a people lies the conviction that God, who is the object of their religious worship, is keenly interested in their integral welfare, especially their concern for political freedom and self-determination as a nation.

a. Theocracy

At the beginning of its history, the people of Israel are unlike other peoples in that they have no king, for they recognize the dominion of Yahweh alone. It is God who intervenes on Israel's behalf through charismatic individuals, as recorded in the Book of Judges. [Compendium, n. 377]

The charismatic individuals through whom God intervened to deliver and govern his people include Moses the lawgiver and the judges. The judges were men, such as Samson, Gideon and Jephthah; as well as women, such as Deborah. The judges came and went intermittently, but the constant leader of Israel was Yahweh himself. Yahweh was the shepherd and Israel was the flock (Psalm 23:1; 80:1). This form of government by God either directly or indirectly through a God-chosen leader was known as theocracy. Theocracy was the first form of government in Israel's national experience. It lasted from Moses and the exodus to the election of Saul as king.

What is the relationship between religion and politics in the Israelite theocratic commonwealth? In a theocracy, politics is not independent but is perceived as part and parcel of religion. God is the sovereign. God alone chooses the human individual through whom he would liberate and govern his people. The people are not consulted in the choice. There are no political parties or campaigns, no voting or election. Politics is simply a subset of religion. The religious leader chosen by God is also the political leader. Political duties are seen as religious duties. Political decisions are made in direct consultation with God. Samuel is the last judge of Israel. It is he who supervises the transition from theocracy to anointed monarchy.

b. Monarchy: Anointed Kingship

The deliverance and governance offered by theocracy was on an ad hoc basis. By the time of Samuel the people of Israel were ready for a more stable form of government, such as was enjoyed by other nations in their geographical vicinity, like Egypt and Mesopotamia. The first attempted solution was for the old and feeble Samuel to hand over the reins of government to his children, thus instituting a would-be dynasty (1 Sam 8:1). The moral decadence and political ineptitude of Samuel's sons was, however, a problem. So the people asked outright for a king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” (1 Sam 8:4-5)

How was this demand for a king received? Scholars have identified in the accounts of the institution of the monarchy in 1 Samuel 1-12, two divergent narrative sources, with two opposing views on the request for a king. These are the anti- and the pro-monarchical sources.

In the anti-monarchical source (1 Sam 7:3-8:22; 10:17-27; 12), the demand for a king is construed as Israel's rejection of God's rule over them. "The LORD said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them'" (1 Sam 8:7). After an unsuccessful attempt to dissuade the people by warning them of "the ways of the king," that is, royal highhandedness and excesses, God finally and reluctantly yielded to the demands of the people.

In the pro-monarchical source (1 Sam 9:1-10:18; 11), there is no mention of divine disapproval or reluctance. Rather we see Samuel as God's prophet, taking the initiative to find Saul and anoint him as first king of Israel. That the spirit of God possessed Saul at his anointing and he spoke in tongues is further evidence of divine approval of the choice of Saul as king.

The anointed monarchical form of government perdured in Israel's history through its highpoint at the time of David and Solomon, its decadence and subsequent breakup of the kingdom into the Northern and Southern domains, and its dissolution at the time of the exile. After the exile, Ezra and Nehemiah restored a type of anointed leadership, this time it was government by priests rather than kings as such. This hierarchy was finally put aside by the Ptolemaic line of kings imposed on the people after their conquest in late 4th century BCE by Alexander the Great.

How did the Israelites participate in politics during the reign of the kings? Generally, it can be said that as their experience of monarchy evolved, so did their model of political involvement. However, there were common characteristics of Israel's political consciousness and involvement under the kings. For one thing, the religious establishment, through the prophets, acted as political watchdogs. The prophet Samuel, who anointed Saul king of Israel, also led the campaign to unseat him when Saul would not obey God and overreached himself by offering a

sacrifice. Saul's successor, David, was similarly checkmated by the prophet Nathan when David used his royal prerogatives to deal injustice to one of his military officers, Uriah. Other examples can be cited, including the well-known case of Elijah's confrontation with Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

The prophets were not always antagonistic to the monarchy, they were also sometimes the king's best protagonists, working closely with the king to achieve the king's programmes for the good of the people. The young king Saul found his greatest support in the prophet Samuel, David could not do without the prophet Nathan, and Elisha was instrumental to the military successes of king Jehoram, so much so that the monarch addressed him as "my father" (2 Kings 6:21). He was a very patriotic prophet, many times intervening positively in the political affairs of the nation. For example, he provided water to a thirsty army (2 Kings 3:4-20), was instrumental in defeating the Moabites (2 Kings 3:21-27), often warned the king of enemy plans and so gave him the strategic military advantage (2 Kings 6:8-12), helped avert defeat at the hands of the Syrians (2 Kings 6:13-7:23), and was involved in the overthrow of Ben-Hadad of Damascus (2 Kings 8:7-15) and Jehu of Israel (2 Kings 9:1-13).

Political involvement in the time of the monarchs was not limited to prophets and religious leaders. The general citizenry had an equally high level of politically awareness and active participation. Suffice it at this point to cite the people's delegation to the young Rehoboam, successor to King Solomon, requesting him not to continue with his father's highhanded and overbearing policies. Rehoboam's failure to recognize that the people had attained a new level of political maturity made him turn down the people's appeal and this ultimately led to the dissolution of the united kingdom of Israel during his tenure as king.

The role of religion in the political life of Israel of the kings cannot be complete without mentioning its crucial role in

preserving national identity during the exile and in restoring political order and governance after the exile. Here we have in mind especially the ministries of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah and that of Ezekiel in keeping hope alive during the exile. The tight cooperation between Ezra and Nehemiah in the return of the exiles back to their homeland, the rebuilding of the temple, and the re-establishment of the political institution is the high water mark in the history of cooperation between church and state in biblical Israel. Historians believe that the custom of priestly rule over the Jews was established at this time, i.e. after the Persian period. (Goodman, M. 1993. p. 33)

In brief, it can be said that during the period of anointed monarchy in ancient Israel, the religious institution participated actively in the political life of the nation. Such participation variously took the paradigmatic forms of being the watchdog, the helpmate and the restorer of the political establishment.

c. Imperialism: Client Kingship

Judea came within the ambient of Greek rule when Alexander the Great conquered the Near East at the end of the fourth century BCE. Following Alexander's death, his empire was divided into the Southern kingdom ruled by the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Northern kingdom ruled by the Seleucids in Syria. Judea became a bone of contention for these two empires. First, it was annexed to the Ptolemies, but subsequently went to the Seleucids. In the year 167 BCE, the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes attempted to eliminate the Jewish religion. This resulted in a mass revolt led by the Maccabees. The Maccabean revolt established a dynasty of high-priest rulers, the Hasmonean dynasty, in Judaea.

In the era of imperial rule, we see the first separation and opposition between a purely political institution in the hands of foreign kings, and a home-grown religious institution which sympathised with the oppressed people and galvanised the liberation struggle in the people's behalf.

The Romans, under Pompey, overthrew the Greeks as the political overlords of the Near East in 66 BCE. Pompey incorporated both the Ptolemaic and the Seleucid kingdoms into the Roman Empire. Jewish resistance, in the form of revolt, was intermittent and sporadic but was no match for Roman military might. This was roughly the state of religion and politics among the Jews when Jesus was born. The Jews were fragmented into many parties distinguished, among other things, by their different attitudes to Roman occupation of Palestine.

There was the Sadducee party, a party of the middle class and aristocrats who were reconciled to the idea of Roman rule and cooperated with the Romans on account of the economic and social gains they derived from it. There was the Pharisee party, a mass spiritual movement of those who believed that their faithfulness to covenant morality would hasten the coming of the Messiah, who would come in heavenly power and might to flush out the Romans and establish the kingdom of God in Israel. And there was the Zealot party, a militant, resistance movement that subscribed to the ideals of intifada or shaking off the yoke of Roman political domination by all means necessary, including violence and bloodshed. In their own eyes, they were freedom fighters; in the eyes of Rome, they were terrorists. These three groups represent three models of religious engagement with a political dispensation that they believed to be unjust and unacceptable to the majority of the people. The three models could be named as: collusion in the case of the Sadducees, passive resistance in the case of the Pharisees, and active resistance in the case of the Zealots.

3. RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

a. John the Baptist and Prophetic Activism

The New Testament portrait of John the Baptist is framed against the background of his characterisation as Elijah redivivus. John

replicated Elijah's mission, his personality, and his lifestyle. Like Elijah, he was the moral conscience of his day. Just as Elijah was a thorn in the flesh of King Ahab, who indulged in royal excesses and corruption, so was John the Baptist to Herod Antipas. Like Elijah, John the Baptist was a political activist. Their activism took the form of prophetic denunciation of the king, even to his face, with the hope that the king would listen and change his ways.

Jesus associated the strategy of John's ministry with violence. "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). The violence of John the Baptist, however, is prophetic violence, a verbal confrontation with the king who, otherwise, enjoyed immunity from violence. There was no recourse to any form of organised or armed resistance. This, of course, rendered the prophet very vulnerable.

The action of John the Baptist that defined his model of political engagement was his denunciation of Herod Antipas "because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done" (Luke 3:19). As a result of this prophetic boldness, Herod locked him up in jail, and later had him beheaded. Thus ended John's prophetic ministry. Jesus, after John, would moderate John's confrontational stance while still upholding his prophetic ministry.

b. Jesus and Non-violent Revolution: the Kingdom of God

Jesus was born, lived and died under the shadow of a political dispensation imposed on his people by foreign overlords. Herod the Great, and his sons Antipas and Agrippa, were not native Jews but Idumeans. Their title to kingly power came not from the people but from the emperor in Rome. It is important to point it out from the outset that Jesus had no direct experience of government of the people by the people. For Nigerians, who have had a long experience of military dictatorship at the hands of their

own nationals, or corrupt but “democratically” elected governments, it is important to take into account the fact that the experiences and teachings of Jesus and his followers on politics were predicated against a significantly different political background.

The overarching theme of Jesus' teaching bordering on religion and politics is “the kingdom of God.” New Testament scholars agree that the expression basileia tou theou refers not so much to kingdom as to kingship. In other words, the kingdom of God refers primarily not to a kingdom (alaeze, in Igbo) with its territorial connotations, but to a reign (ochichị, in Igbo) which connotes a primarily personal jurisdiction, without excluding the territorial.

Some have understood the kingdom of God as an alternative society to the kingdoms of this world. Many charismatic religious leaders down through the history of the church have summoned their followers to abandon normal life in society and congregate in a special territorial location with a view to establishing the kingdom of God. An imperfect example of this could be cited in a strategy adopted by the Holy Ghost Fathers, the pioneer missionaries to the eastern parts of Nigeria. They established specifically Christian communities (ogbe ndi uka) over and against the traditional communities of the land. Such an understanding of the kingdom of God or the church as an alternative society is not traceable to the teachings and example of Jesus.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God at the same time permeated and transcended the secular order. It permeated the secular order in that it acts imperceptibly but surely to transform society and the world from within. In this regard, it is compared to salt, to yeast, and to the unobservable growing of the plant. Yet, as Jesus himself, makes clear, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to

keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Thus, the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus transcends the world. The kingdom of God is a mysterious reality which, while being present and active in the world, at the same time transcends it.

What model of church-state relationship did Jesus espouse? Against the background of contemporary religio-political parties of his time, one can say for sure that Jesus did not endorse the Sadducee model of collusion with the powers that be, neither did he endorse the Zealot model of violent and armed resistance against them. When, at his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, one of his disciples fought back and struck off the ear of the high priest's servants, Jesus rebuked his disciple for reacting with violence to the provocation. "Put your sword back into its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:51-52).

Jesus' model of religious involvement in politics is much closer to the Pharisee model. It adopts the principle of passive resistance, it is nonviolent, and the means for attaining the desired end is essentially spiritual. The politics of Jesus differed from the Pharisaic model, however, in the sense that whereas the Pharisees expected in the end to achieve a political and nationalistic kingdom, Jesus expected to achieve an eschatological and universal one.

Compared to John the Baptist, Jesus' engagement with politics was less confrontational and more diplomatic. Yet he did not fare much better, for he too would die charged and convicted of crimes against Caesar and the Roman political establishment. But the non-violent revolution he started caught on and was successful. The Christian quest for a new political orientation, when phrased in light of the politics of Jesus, is a quest for how to keep the revolution of love preached by Jesus alive in our own time and place.

c. Paul and Overtures in Realpolitik

Paul and his companion Luke adopt an attitude to Roman imperial authority which can best be described as realpolitik. Realpolitik is politics based on practical, rather than moral or ideological, considerations. It is practical politics with an end to achieving a desired result, even at the risk of ideological inconsistency. Some see it as politics of expediency as opposed to politics of ideals.

There are two particular incidents in the Acts of the Apostles where we see Paul playing the card of realpolitik.¹ The first incident is Paul before the Roman tribune. The tribune had given orders for Paul to be brought into the barracks and interrogated by flogging in order to find out what crime he had committed.

But when they had tied him up with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?” 26 When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen” (Acts 22:25-26).

As a result of claiming Roman citizenship, Paul was no longer flogged. The second incident is Paul before the Sanhedrin. As the narrative goes,

When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6).

That interjection divided the council, Pharisees against Sadducees, with the result that Paul escaped getting a conviction. These two incidents are a window into Paul's wider political

consciousness and praxis. At the time of Paul's public ministry, the big problem that faced the Jesus movement was persecution by Roman imperial authority. This was a departure from the situation in the lifetime of Jesus, when any opposition was limited to local synagogue and temple administration. We can see this in the fact that the martyrdom of Jesus was masterminded by the temple administration whereas that of Paul, some thirty years later, was an imperial Roman affair.

Rome persecuted Christians unfairly. Paul knew this. Yet Paul would not openly denounce the Romans. This was the same Paul who boasted of his open denunciation of Peter, the head of the apostolic college, when Peter would no longer share table fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14). Yet, when it had to do with relations with Roman imperial powers, Paul took advantage of every opportunity to speak well of them. Paul wanted Rome to see that Christians were well disposed toward the emperor and so to stop persecuting them. It is in this spirit of realpolitik that we are to understand Paul's teachings on church-state relations, such as we have in Romans 13.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due (Rom 13:1-7).

That this comes from the same Paul who tells the Philippians that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20) makes this passage a hard one to understand. The difficulty arises when we take this passage as an absolute teaching. When we see it, however, as an exercise in realpolitik, the difficulty is minimised. We shall come back to this passage in the section below on biblical obstacles in the way of active Christian participation in politics.

Following Paul, Luke, who was Paul's trusted companion in his missionary journeys (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11) also embraced and practised realpolitik. His two volumes on Christian origins, namely, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, were both dedicated to “His Excellency, Theophilus” who is generally believed to be a Roman official. In these two books characters representing Roman officials are always portrayed as friend, not as enemies, of the Jesus movement. Scholars see in this overly positive portrayal of Rome and its officials a pointer to Luke's editorial policy of fence-mending with Roman imperialism, an exercise in realpolitik.

d. John and Apocalyptic Dualism

In the Apocalypse of John, and to a lesser extent in the other works of Johannine literature, we see a paradigm shift in church-state relations. The insipid dualism in John's gospel blossoms into full-blown dualism in the social doctrine of the Apocalypse. The secular order is portrayed as being in mortal conflict with the spiritual order as represented by the Jesus movement. Imperial Rome is demonised and becomes the anti-Christ, also known as, Babylon, good enough for one thing only, utter destruction. The era of prophetic criticism, which kept alive the hope that the imperial establishment could still rethink and be redeemed is over. It is now either empire (Babylon) or the kingdom of Christ. In anticipation, the Apocalypse celebrates the victory of Christ and the fall of Rome. “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen” (Rev 14:8; 18:2).

Johannine Apocalyptic dualism led to a systematic doctrine of the church as an alternative and ideal society. To become a Christian was understood as abandoning the sinking ship of the kingdom of the world and boarding the unsinkable ship of the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.” (Rev 11:15). This displacement theology led to the gradual appropriation by Christians of titles and attributes that originally applied to the political reality of the Roman Empire.

Evidence of such appropriation of imperial titles and attributes abound in the books of the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation. Here are some obvious examples:

i. **Jesus as Lord of Lords**

One of the titles of Caesar is Dominus (Lord). To profess that Jesus is Lord is to say that Caesar is not Lord. It is a treasonable offence that could cost a believer his or her life. The Christian confession is that Jesus Christ is “our only Master and Lord” (Jude 1:4). “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This is a confession no one makes lightly, since it has enormous implications, life and death implications. Such a revolutionary and subversive confession can only be made through a special empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That is why “no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

ii. **Jesus as King of Kings**

The Roman Empire covered the whole of the then known world. Subject nations had their kings, who reigned at the pleasure of the emperor. These nations had their kings, Rome had the king of kings. To call Jesus not just a king but the king of Jesus was a direct

and open affront to the emperor. Yet this is exactly what the early Christians did. In Revelation 17:14 the beast and its ten kings in collusion with it will make war on the Lamb “and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” Lest anyone should miss the political import of this title, they give Jesus another title that has explicit territorial claim, “king of the nations.” “Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!” (Revelation 15:3), |

iii. **Jesus as the Omnipotent**

The Roman emperor was regarded as the all-powerful one. He had the whole world in his hands. There was no doubt about that. He could have his way in all the earth and no one would challenge him. It was only with Roman administrative approval that Jesus was crucified. Yet these Christians who were being hounded by Rome for their beliefs gather together in a dark room or catacomb and break into an halleluiah chorus, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns” (Revelation 19:6) and “We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign” (Revelation 11:17). What a revisionist theology of history!

I v. **Jesus as God/Son of God**

From the time of Caesar Augustus, the emperors were deified, that is, declared to be gods, at their death. While the Caesar lived he was declared to be *divi filius* (“son of god”). The apocalyptic dualism and theology of substitution in which “the old order changeth, giving place to new” made it easy for the early Christians to see Jesus as “son of God” while he lived, and as “God”

now that he is dead and has passed on to eternal glory. “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev 4:11).

v. **Jesus Worshipped as God**

The deified Caesar was worshipped as a god. This worship was exacted by the imperial cult from the people of Rome and the nations that made up the empire. The early Christians resisted this enforced worship, calling it idolatry. Instead, they transferred their worship to Christ, whom they believed deserved to be worshipped by all nations. “Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:4).

vi. **Jesus Offered Incense**

One way the imperial cult used to determine who was submissive to Caesar and who was not was by demanding a public offering of incense from suspects. Refusal to offer incense to the emperor was judged to be a treasonable affront to the deity, the punishment for which was death. Faithful Christians refused to offer incense to Caesar. For them the one who should receive their offering of incense is the crucified and now glorified Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. “The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev 5:8).

vii. **Christians as Fellow Citizens**

In the imperial commonwealth of Rome, there were two classes of members, citizens who enjoyed certain rights and privileges, and non-citizens, including slaves, who

did not enjoy the privileges and protection given by the state to its citizens. Christians understood themselves to constitute an alternative and ideal society in which there was no such class distinction. There were no longer strangers and aliens, all were equally citizens with full rights and protection. Thus the Christian commonwealth was an attractive alternative to those who were systematically discriminated against in the Roman commonwealth. “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians – you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28 NLT - a paraphrastical translation).

4. RELIGION AND POLITICS IN NIGERIAN CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE

The current presence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria came about mainly through the missionary efforts of Irish SMA and Holy Ghost missionaries in the 19th century. Before the arrival of the Catholic Church, there were already Anglican CMS missionaries active in the country. This chain of events is very significant for the future political orientation of the Nigerian Catholic church.

Nigeria was a colony of Great Britain, where the Church of England, the Anglican Church, was the state religion. With the might of colonialism came Anglicanism. Anglicanism came to Nigeria as a helpmate of colonialism. The first Anglican ministers came to Nigeria not principally in the interest of the people of Nigeria but to service the spiritual needs of the agents of colonialism. In Nigeria, Anglicanism became the de facto state religion.

The beginning of Catholicism in Nigeria is a very different story.

It was brought by the Irish who were in a state of war with the British, a religio-political conflict between Anglicans and Catholics. Since the British were in power together with their Nigerian Anglican converts, the Irish and their Roman Catholic converts were left in the cold, politically speaking, far from the corridors of power. Their political activity was limited to criticising the government and the politicians. It is true that the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers embarked on a massive apostolate of education for the people. But the goal of much of the education was to give Catholics enough education to enable them hold a decent job in the education sector or in the civil service. Political education or education for community leadership was not high on the priority list of their educational goals.

The Nigerian Catholic church was politically marginalised. Though Catholics constituted the majority, in terms of numbers, in terms of political clout and influence, they were the minority. How many of the pioneer top Christian politicians in Nigeria were Catholics? Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Mbonu Ojike, Akanu Ibiam, Michael Okpara, Herbert Macaulay, Anthony Enahoro, Dennis Osadebay, Nwafor Orizu – how many of them, if any, were Catholics?

One of Aesop's fables is about The Fox and the Grapes. A hungry fox saw some clusters of ripe black grapes hanging from a vine. She jumped and jumped to get at them, but wearied herself in vain, for she could not reach them. At last she turned away, hiding her disappointment and saying: "The grapes are sour, and not ripe as I thought." A similar thing happened to the early Catholic Church in Nigeria with regard to access to political power.

Because they were excluded from political power and top leadership positions in the British colonial administration, Catholics consoled themselves by calling politics a dirty game, good enough only for those who do not value their spiritual and eternal welfare. They cultivated a monastic spirituality of flight

from the world, as a way of making virtue of necessity. The British colonial administration has come and gone, yet Nigerian Catholics still maintain their suspicion of politics. Old habits die hard.

It is now almost fifty years after independence and still we have a Nigerian Catholic political culture that can be characterised as (a) passive rather than active, (b) reactive rather than proactive, (c) hiding one's light under the bushel basket rather than letting it shine, (d) cursing the darkness rather than lighting a candle, (e) following the winner rather than bearing witness to the truth.

In the religio-political entity called Nigeria, Christians say that they are a marginalised majority. Within the Christian religio-political camp, Catholics again see themselves as the marginalised majority. Is it then right to say that the Nigerian Catholic Church, as a religio-political constituency is the marginalised of the marginalised groups in Nigeria? One way to know if she is or not, is to enumerate all the heads of state that Nigeria has ever had, together with their religious affiliations. It will be found that Christians are in the minority. Now, among the Christian few, how many of them, if any, are Catholics? That is one way to show that the Nigerian Catholic Church is one of the most marginalised of all the marginalised religio-political groups in Nigeria.

5. BIBLICAL FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF NIGERIAN CATHOLICS IN POLITICS

What keeps Nigerian Catholics from making their rightful contribution to the political development of Nigeria is not just an accident of history, such as we have seen above. The present reality of our religious culture also shares part of the blame. In this section I want to highlight certain biblical factors that militate against active involvement of Nigerian Catholics in politics. My

point of departure is to say that these biblical factors, in themselves, do not militate against politics, rightly understood and practised. Rather, their negative effect on our culture is owing to the ways in which they have been understood. I have isolated three of such passages. For each of them, we shall see the way they are popularly understood, which makes them problematic for a political application. Then we shall go on to indicate other ways of understanding them in context, which restores their original political significance.

a. **To Ask for A King is to Reject God**

As we saw above, when the Israelites demanded a king, like other nations, God objected on the grounds that such was tantamount to rejecting him. God's objection to Israel having a king suggests that there is a necessary conflict between religious commitment and the political process. It suggests that God does not want his people to be involved in the political process of choosing a king and running the machinery of government. But is that really so? A closer reading of the text shows that God was warning the people against the evils and excesses of a corrupt and indulgent ruler.

He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will take

your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day." (1 Sam 8:11-18)

There is no evidence that God objected to his people having a good king. Could it be that the Israelites were not yet mature enough to rule themselves? Elsewhere in the anti-monarchical source God explains himself more clearly:

If you will fear the LORD and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well; 15 but if you will not heed the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. (1 Sam 12:14-15)

Now it is clear that God's objection was to a bad king, and not to a good king. God does not object to a good political process that brings a good and deserving ruler to power. God objects to a skewed political process that brings a corrupt and undeserving candidate to power.

Earlier we saw that the institution of the monarchy narrative we have in the Bible comes from two sources, an anti-monarchical source in which God first objects and later consents to Israel having a king, and a pro-monarchical source that mentions no soft-pedalling but full cooperation and initiative on the part of God and his prophet, Samuel. How do scholars explain the

presence of these two apparently contradictory sources. Scholars believe that the pro-monarchical source is the earlier source. The anti-monarchical source, they believe, developed as a result of the failure of the monarchy to deliver on the common good for which God gave his people a king. The anti-monarchical source as such represents history in hindsight. Such history in hindsight was the hallmark of the Deuteronomic historian, who rewrote the history of Israel during the exilic and post-exilic period.

b. Give to Caesar What is Caesar's

The dominical saying in Matt 22:21 (// Mark. 12:17 // Lk. 20:25) “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” can create problems for a balanced Christian orientation to politics. On face value, the saying seems to suggest that religion and politics are two parallel lines that never meet. There are times and places to give to God what is God's and there are times and places to give to Caesar what is Caesars. Religion and politics are two spheres of human activity with different sets of rules that should be kept separate. Religion should not interfere with politics, neither should politics interfere with religion.

It is this way of understanding this important teaching of our Lord that made a former dictatorial Nigerian head of state warn the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria to contend themselves with preaching the gospel in church and take their hands off the business of politics. The military head of state, his being a Muslim notwithstanding, actually quoted this biblical saying to the bishops.

There are many Catholic politicians in Nigerian and elsewhere who, on the strength of this saying, believe that the church has nothing to teach them on politics, since religion and politics are two entirely different pursuits that should be kept apart. They are convinced that the under-performance of Catholics in politics is owing to their trying to be religious and political at the same time,

trying to give to God what belongs to Caesar. This was demonstrated in the 2004 presidential elections in the USA when the candidate for the Democratic Party, John Kerry, a Catholic, ran on a pro-choice platform, a position that ran contrary to basic Catholic moral principles. He argued that the Catholic pro-life stand against abortion was valid as a religious teaching binding in conscience, but should not determine or influence his stand on pro-choice as a political principle. In effect what he was saying was, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. The Catholic bishops and faithful did not buy such a schizophrenic approach to the relation between religion and politics. They massively withdrew their support from him and he failed.

If giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's does not mean that there are two separate realms to be respected, God's and Caesar's, religion and politics, what then does it mean? First, from the gospel context, we see that the question about paying taxes to Caesar was not a question put to Jesus in good faith. It was a question put to Jesus by his adversaries hoping to catch Jesus in something he might say so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor (Luke 20:20 // Matt 22:15 // Mark 12:13). A crafty question deserves a crafty answer, so Jesus gave them a crafty answer that is easy to misunderstand, and misunderstand it we did.

We may come close to a right understanding of this cryptic saying if we ask ourselves what is it that belongs to Caesar and what to God. The psalmist tells us that "the earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Ps 24:1). That means that Caesar and all his empire do belong ultimately to God. Caesar cannot claim autonomy from God. His authority and claim to obedience and tax comes through God to whom he is ultimately accountable.

Cassidy in his book Christians and Roman Rule in the New Testament comes to the following insightful but controversial

conclusion on the question of paying taxes to Caesar.

If Caesar is proving to be a reliable steward in terms of those things that God would have accomplished, then taxes may appropriately be given in support of Caesar's stewardship. However, if Caesar's policies and practices are antithetical to the things that God desires, then no obligation exists to pay the demanded taxes. (Cassidy, 2001. p. 29)

- c. All Authority Comes From God. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:1-2)

These words of Paul seem to suggest that every political regime is put in place and blessed by God. This is irrespective of whether the regime is democratically elected or took power into its own hands by use of force, whether it respects basic human rights or is despotic and tyrannical, whether it provides the goods and services that people need or whether they are there to enrich themselves. So long as one has the political power, that power comes from God and no one should resist it. Understood in this superficial sense, this passage is one that could deter active Christian participation in politics. The reasons are obvious.

First and foremost, it not only discourages but altogether proscribes political activism. When we look back today and see all the cooperation that some German bishops and faithful gave to Adolf Hitler in his genocidal plot to wipe out the Jews from the face of the earth and dominate the whole world, we wonder

whatever happened to their moral conscience. A superficial understanding of a biblical text like this could be used to dull their consciences and turn them into zombies who swallow whatever the leader says and do whatever the leader commands. On the other hand, people like the future John Paul II, who defied government edicts and helped Jews to escape would incur judgment for resisting the authorities that God had appointed.

Secondly, this teaching, as popularly understood, encourages political prostitutionism, a follow the winning party syndrome, a belief that the right party is the winning party, ultimately a belief in the principle of might is right. One cannot but think of the Anambra State saga where, in the 2003 election, the Catholic Church unofficially endorsed Peter Obi, the APGA candidate. After the election, an election which most people believed to be anything but free and fair, Chris Ngige of the PDP was declared to be the winner. Quickly the church changed and backed Ngige and called on Peter Obi to drop his legal challenge of the election result. After years of litigation, the courts declared Peter Obi to be the rightful winner of the governorship seat. Again, as the story goes, the church changed and began to back Peter Obi. If you do not understand what I mean by political prostitutionism, there is a good example for you.

Paul's teaching in Romans 13 seems to encourage politics without principles. But that is not what Paul meant to communicate to the Christians of Rome. He did not want the Roman Christians to be political pushovers. How then would they exercise their prophetic role in the instance of a corrupt government if "whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment?" (verse 2). Fortunately, the same teaching could be understood as relative to a particular socio-historical context and not as an absolute moral statement.

To start with, there is a certain discontinuity between the political teaching of Paul in Romans and his teaching in Philippians. In Romans Paul addresses the Christians as citizens of the Roman

Empire. He, therefore, teaches them to be law-abiding citizens. Paul warns them against any form of resistance to imperial authority. In *Philippians*, on the other hand, when Paul warns the believers against those “whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things” (*Philippians* 3:19), it is believed he has in mind the imperial court and those who collude with them to persecute Christians. Those people live as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (verse 18). But for us Christians, he declares, “our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (*Philippians* 3:20). In other words, Christians are citizens of heaven before citizens of Rome. This implies that their primary and absolute obedience is to God rather than to imperial authority.

Why did Paul change his position on the Christian orientation to political authority so radically? In his book *The Essence of Religion* Ludwig Feuerbach says that “A man thinks differently in a palace and in a hut.” Paul wrote the *Letter to the Romans* about the year AD 54 when he was enjoying the *Pax Romana* (the peace of Rome), freely travelling about preaching the gospel. At that stage in his life he hoped that by submitting to Roman imperial authority Christians could ward off the threat of persecution. By the time he wrote *Philippians* about the year AD 64, imperial Rome under Nero had unleashed a severe persecution against defenceless Christians. He himself was sitting in a jail in Rome awaiting sentencing and probable beheading. By then he had come to the realisation that his trust in the fairness of the Roman imperial system was misplaced. You can compare Paul now to Cardinal Wolsey who, under King Henry VIII of England, gave his primary allegiance to the king rather than to God. On his deathbed, betrayed and in chains falsely accused of treasonable felony, he is reported as expressing his disappointment in these words: “If I had served God as diligently as I have done the king, He would not have given me over in my gray hairs.”

Does this historical analysis prove that the words of Paul in Romans 13 are false? No, but it shows that his teaching in Romans 13, which sounds like an unconditional submission to any governing authority whatsoever, are indeed conditioned statements. Paul's teaching still holds true given the condition that the government is legally constituted and fulfils the purpose of the state. What is the purpose of the State? The Catechism on the Church and Politics gives us the answer.

The purpose of the State is the protection and promotion of the common good. In general this purpose is accomplished through three tasks: (1) legislation and administration of justice, (2) promotion of the socio-economic welfare and health, and (3) care for cultural and moral concerns or the fostering of good morals (Catechism, 1998, n. 2.).

Paul was speaking about a government that fulfilled the purpose of the state, so understood. He was speaking of “rulers [who] are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad” (Rom 13:3). He has in mind a governor who is “God's servant for your good ... [who] does not bear the sword in vain; [who] is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer” (verse 4). He is speaking of “authorities [who] are ministers of God” (verse 6). It is only a government that fits this description that has the moral authority to expect the full cooperation and support of the citizenry.

Paul's teaching in Romans 13 that the Christians in Rome should give unalloyed support to the good and just government which they were then enjoying should not be cited as a pretext for political lethargy, much less for lending supporting to an unjust and corrupt regime. As Christians and a prophetic people, we are duty bound to be the watchdog and the moral conscience of the political institution, affirming and supporting a regime that is

doing well,' critiquing and denouncing a regime that is a failure and a disappointment to the people that elected them.

The clarifications and qualifications given in the Catechism on the Church and Politics succinctly bring out the correct import of this difficult Pauline passage:

Every human community needs authority to govern it. It is necessary for the common good and the unity of the State. It is required by the moral order and comes from God. When legitimately constituted authority is exercised within the limits of its competence and in accord with the moral law, it must be respected and obeyed.

While citizens are bound in conscience to obey political authority, they are not obliged to obey commands that are morally wrong. Political authority must not be used contrary to the moral law. This is why Vatican II says: "It is legitimate for them (citizens) to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens against abuses of this authority within the limits of the natural law and the law of the Gospel." This is especially true "when citizens are under the oppression of a public authority which oversteps its competence" (GS, 74). St. Peter himself disobeyed the order of authorities and said "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:19). (Catechism, 1998. pars. 31-32)

6. TOWARD A NIGERIAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND ETHIC OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

a. Church's Teachings on Politics

Following the social doctrine of the church, what moral and religious principles should guide politics? Limitations of time and space do not permit us to go into this area in depth. We shall only highlight a few of the principles which we reckon to be

pivotal and indispensable in any synthesis of the church's teachings on politics.

i. **Human Dignity and Solidarity As the First Principle of Politics**

The Church contributes to the political order the vision of the equal dignity and inviolability of every human person from conception to natural death. This equal dignity of all human beings is the foundation of basic human rights which should be guaranteed to all. This vision of the human person brings the body politic in solidarity with and in defence of the poor and disadvantaged members of society. In more developed and more just political systems, a social welfare package is provided to citizens who are jobless, who want to work but cannot find a job.

ii. **The Common Good as the Goal of Political Activity**

The church teaches that the goal of political activity is the common good. And the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church defines the common good as "the good of all people and of the whole person." (Compendium, 2004. n. 165). Similarly, the mission of the church is the salvation of all persons and of the whole person. Integral salvation is the salvation of the whole person, soul and body, spiritual and temporal. This is why Jesus not only forgave sins but also healed people from sickness.

In its mission to minister salvation to all people, the church preaches repentance both from the personal sins of individuals and from the social sins of institutions. In the field of politics, occasions for social sins abound. Such social sins include bribery and corruption, greed and embezzlement of public fund, and the dirty politics of eliminating one's political opponents through the use of

thugs and hired assassins. Where such evils become systemic and structural, we speak of structures of sin or structures of injustice.

iii. **Authority and Power As A Divine Trust for Service**

It is not just happenstance that we use the word “minister” to refer to both a church leader and state official. According to Paul, civil “authorities are ministers of God” (Rom 13:6). A minister is someone entrusted with a service. Political authorities need to realise that it the people and, ultimately, God who entrust them with the service of the state. This realisation calls for responsible management and accountability in the way they carry out their mandate. As the Compendium says,

They must show appreciation for the democratic system “inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.” They must also reject all secret organizations that seek to influence or subvert the functioning of legitimate institutions. (Compendium, n. 567)

iv. **Autonomy and Mutual Collaboration Between the Church and the Political Community** Church and state are autonomous, yet they need to work in mutual collaboration. The reason for this is that both church and state serve the same human constituency. Both have an end to serve the good of every person and of the whole person. As the Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), puts it,

In their proper sphere, the church and the political community are mutually independent and self-governing. Yet by a different title, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. This service can be more effectively rendered for the good of all, if each works better for wholesome mutual cooperation, depending on the circumstances of time and place. (Gaudium et Spes, n. 76.)"

The church and the state are to be seen not as thorns in each other's flesh but as mutual collaborators in the integral well-being of our people.

v. Principles Guiding Political Participation of Catholics

To conclude this brief look at the church's social teaching on politics, let me share with you what the Philippine Catholic Bishops have listed as the essential principles guiding a Catholic understanding of and participation in politics. It is easy to see how these principles have been distilled from the general teaching we have discussed above;

- (1) That the basic standard for participation be the pursuit of the common good
- (2) That participation be characterized by a defence and promotion of justice
- (3) That participation be inspired and guided by the spirit of service
- (4) That it be imbued with a love of preference for the poor; and
- (5) That empowering people be carried out both as a process and as a goal of political activity.
(Catechism, 1998. n. 24)

b. Contextual Understanding of Church's Teachings on Politics

The church's social teachings on politics are formulated in the light of gospel values and against the background of long experience of politics and its evolution in Europe and America. They do not necessarily reflect our African indigenous political reality and experience. This calls for the need for the African church and state analyst to adopt an heuristic approach in order to discover what works in the African context and what does not.

Much of the church's accumulated wisdom on political engagement were developed in the so-called Catholic countries of Europe. Virtually all countries in Europe had state religions, for example, France, Italy and Spain were Catholic, England was Anglican, Germany was Lutheran, and so on. The situation is very different in Africa. Few countries in Africa can claim to enjoy the luxury of a state religion, and Nigeria, definitely, is not one of them. Nigeria can hardly be described as a Christian, much less a Catholic country. This variable will definitely inform the appropriation in Nigeria of the church's general teachings on politics.

Another variable is that, by and large, the countries of Europe are virtually one-nation states, enjoying natural ethnic borders. African countries, on the other hand, are multiple or fragmented nation states whose artificial borders do not follow ethnic lines. The French speak French, Italians speak Italian, Germans speak German. In African countries, on the other hand, there are no such common home-grown languages uniting the citizens. This is another specific factor that is bound to influence the quest for a viable religio-political culture in Africa. As the Compendium directs,

It is up to the Christian community to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it

the light of the Gospel's inalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. (Compendium, n. 574)

One possible area of such collective discernment touches on the question of whether or not ordained clergy and vowed religious can participate in partisan politics. It is popularly assumed that this is a no-go area for clergy and religious in the worldwide Catholic church. A closer look, however, shows that the ban of priests and religious from partisan politics is not absolute. Strictly speaking, following Church Law, it is possible for a priest or religious to participate in partisan politics, but this must be done only when certain conditions are met and with the permission of the "competent ecclesiastical authority."

The 1983 Code of Canon Law, for example, in Can. 285 §3 states that "Clerics are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power." Can. 287 §2 is more explicit: "They are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions unless, in the judgment of the competent ecclesiastical authority, this is required for the defence of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good" (Italics mine). Can. 672 extends the regulations in the above canons to all religious, clerical or lay: "Religious are bound by the provisions of Canon. 277, 285, 286, 287 and 289."

The concrete situations in which we find ourselves in Africa differ not just a bit from the general worldwide situation. For example, in most rural communities in Africa, the priest and the religious constitute the intellectual and social elite. They are among the few who read the newspapers and who can analyse political developments in light of Catholic social teaching. They belong to the frontline of the communities' leaders of thought. To keep such people from making such useful contributions to the

evolving political culture of the people as they are capable of making may be tantamount to hiding one's light under the bushel basket, which Jesus condemned.

Why it is questionable is that the present high level of political culture in Europe benefited immensely from the contributions of the clergy and the religious. Suffice it here to cite the example of Don Luigi Sturzo, the Sicilian priest and leading antifascist who founded the Partito Popolare Italiano in 1919. Closer to our own times, the involvement of clergy and religious in Solidarity, the mass movement that rose to challenge and eventually overthrew the Communist party in Poland, is no secret.

Maybe the question for the clergy and religious in Africa should not be "to participate or not to participate" but "how to participate." The case of Reverend Father Moses Adasu, who contested and won the governorship of Benue state, is still fresh in our minds. Fr Adasu had the blessings of most Catholics bishops in Nigeria, secretly if not openly. Before embarking on partisan politics he asked for a temporary suspension from public ministry as a priest. His tenure as governor of Benue state remains one of the rare instances in recent Nigerian political experience of leadership by example. While his fellow priests were busy talking the talk of how to sanitise Nigerian politics he walked the walk and proved that the church's teaching on politics are practicable.

Governor Adasu once responded to allegations that as a priest, he should not have ventured into politics, which is popularly believed to be a dirty game. "I am in politics to baptise politics and make it pure," said Adasu. He explained that politics is not a dirty game. It is those who are in it for selfish reasons that make it dirty. As a man of God, he said, he has devoted his life to service of mankind and was prepared to die to make society a better place for present and future generations." (Adasu, 2003)

There is danger if the Catholic Church in a country becomes identified with one political party. There is even more danger if

priests and religious are allowed to campaign against one another from conflicting political platforms. Hence the need for the Nigerian Catholic church to provide guidelines and conditions under which a member of the clergy or religious who is so inclined could engage in partisan politics. One of such conditions could be that they could only campaign as independent candidates and not as a card-carrying member of one of the registered political parties. The Catholic church definitely did not like the way in which priests and religious participated in active politics in Latin America in the name of liberation theology. Part of the problem, as I see it, is that they acted without the advantage of guidelines. Some priests in Nigeria are now doing the same. Hence the need for guidelines.

Another area where we could make a mistake of swallowing the church's general teachings on politics hook, line, and sinker is in insisting on a politics of perfectionism. There is no perfect political system anywhere in the world. Some of the church's teachings on politics could be seen as guiding ideals rather than binding decrees. This will liberate the Catholic politician in Nigeria from being too idealistic. Realism is the name of the game. Politics in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country necessarily involves much dialogue and compromise, and sometimes comes down in practice to the principle of option for the lesser evil.

This brings us to one indispensable ingredient in designing an effective Nigerian Catholic ethic of political engagement, namely, internal dialogue. Any Nigeria Catholic interested in politics already knows that no meaningful political career is possible in this country without dialogue with non-Catholics and even non-Christians. There is no doubt about that. The area of dialogue we seem to be neglecting more is internal dialogue, dialogue among us Catholics so that as a political constituency we can present a common front in our involvement in Nigerian politics.

Look at the Catholic dioceses in the south-eastern states of the country, for example. The political orientation of Owerri archdiocese is different from that of Enugu diocese, which is different from that of Nsukka diocese, which again is different from that of Awka diocese. The way each of these dioceses relates to the ruling People's Democratic Party, for example, is different. Would it not make better political sense to have a common orientation and approach to political developments in the country. This can only be possible if the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria would put in place a veritable mechanism of internal political dialogue and conscientisation. If this is not done, the danger is that the Catholics in each of the dioceses would run the risk of confusing the opinions of their diocesan leaders with the authoritative positions of the Catholic Church. The Compendium warns against this.

“No one is permitted to identify the authority of the Church exclusively with his own opinion;” believers should rather “try to guide each other by sincere dialogue in a spirit of mutual charity and with anxious interest above all in the common good.”
(Compendium, 574)

c. Practical Biblical Principles for Effective Christian Political Action

In this final section, I venture to tease out some practical biblical principles for effective Christian political action. I have just three of such principles taken from the gospels: (i) Be in the world but not of the world, (ii) Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and (iii) Be as shrewd as the children of this world.

i. Be in the world but not of the world

I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.
(John 17:15-16)

The Christian politician is in the world, deals with the world, understands the ways things work in the world, yet, is not of the world. There is a necessary healthy tension in the life of the Christian politician that no one should try to dissolve by leaning too much in one direction or the other. That Christian politicians are not of this world means that their motivation, their inspiration, their trust and confidence for personal security and success, and even their ultimate reward are in God. At the same time, they are in the world and know what needs to be done to give themselves a chance of succeeding at the polls. Like the wise virgins of the biblical parables, they must plan ahead and be ready for any eventuality. Christian leaders stand tall with their heads high up in the clouds of idealism but with their feet firmly planted on the ground of realism.

ii. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Matt 10:16)

Christian politicians often feel vulnerable in the face of threats and machinations of rival politicians who have no fear of God. Some Christian politicians have been known to compromise their faith and trust in God in a bid to protect themselves from such threats and machinations. Jesus foresaw all that. He knows that, naturally speaking, in the midst of other politicians, Christian

politicians are like sheep among wolves, which means, that they are very vulnerable. He has a remedy for the situation. "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." The word translated as "wise" also means shrewd, cunning, smart, prudent, and diplomatic. At the same time, Christian politicians must be innocent as doves, which means that they must remain free of evil intent, not given to violence as a political strategy, and not indulging in corruption. This is the practical formula for personal security, integrity and success in the business of politics.

iii. Be as shrewd as the children of this world

And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. (Luke 16:8)

Dishonest politicians (the word "manager" in Luke 16:8 also means "minister") have a penchant for shrewdness. They know how to do evil, cover their tracks, and get rewarded by the very people they swindled. Think of the so-called Maradonas and the evil geniuses of our political past. Evil-minded people know how to organise themselves, gang up, spend sleepless nights planning and scheming until they get what they want. Why can't men and women of goodwill organise themselves and pull their resources to achieve their noble aspirations which advance the common good? Jesus does not say that the children of light should imitate the children of this world in their principle of the end justifying the means. No. He means that with smart planning and pulling of resources his followers can outdo the children of darkness and beat them in their own game.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will like to summarise some of the significant points we have seen in this essay. The paper set out with a view to establishing that we can be fully Catholic and fully political at the same time. To do this we looked at the various ways that the Old Testament people of God, Israel, and also the New Testament Christians participated in politics. We saw various models of political engagement, starting from theocracy, anointed monarchy and client kingship in the Old Testament to prophetic activism of John the Baptist, non-violent revolution of Jesus the Christ, realpolitik of Paul and apocalyptic dualism of John the Divine in the New Testament. We saw a plurality of models, meaning that there is no one model of church-state relations that is exclusively Christian.

Then we looked at religion and politics in Nigerian Catholic experience. We saw that, unlike the Nigerian Anglican church, the Catholic Church was born and grew up far from the corridors of power. We were politically marginalised and tried to save face by calling politics sour grapes or worse still a dirty game unworthy of a good Catholic.

Then we looked at biblical factors that have continued to give Nigerian Catholics a skewed understanding of politics long after the early missionaries had left. We saw three passages: the view that asking for a king was tantamount to rejecting God's rule, the view that giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar implies that there is no meeting point between religion and politics, and the view that any existing political regime is sanctioned by God and should never be opposed, which leads to a follow-the-dictator syndrome. We saw other and more faithful ways of understanding these passages in their literary and historical contexts.

This brought us to a quest for a Nigerian Catholic ethic of political engagement. Here we first did a quick survey of the church's teaching on politics. Then we made the point that these general

teachings have to be appropriated inter-culturally before they can function effectively in the Nigerian context. This is because the Nigerian historical and religio-political context differs in significant ways from that of the European countries in light of whose experience the church distilled these principles. In particular, we pointed out the need for the Nigerian Catholic church to revisit the total ban in the world-wide Catholic church of priests and religious from active participation in partisan politics.

Finally, we looked at practical biblical principles for effective Christian political action. We saw three of such principles: be in the world but not of the world, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and be as shrewd as the children of this world. In these principles we see the need for Catholic politicians to be politically smart while at the same time maintaining their moral rectitude. We underlined the need for good and God-fearing politicians to organise themselves and synergise to beat the godless politicians in their machinations. Catholic politicians in Nigeria should play to win. And to win, they do not need to deny their religious and moral principles as Catholics.

Before I sign off, I will like to present for your admiration, inspiration and emulation two heroic Catholic politicians. One is the first and only Catholic president of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) in the country's over 230 years as a sovereign nation. Kennedy did not deny his faith or his moral principles in his campaign as president of America. He presented himself as a committed Catholic and a good American who would make a good president. He did not disappoint. Compare him with John Kerry, who did not identify himself fully with Catholic social and moral principles, especially in his support for legalised abortion. He failed. Voters do not like candidates who are perceived as lukewarm in their faith, whatever their faith may be.

The other exemplary Catholic politician I am presenting before you is – you guessed it – Saint Thomas More. This is a shining example of a man who saw politics as service of God and the people, a man who practised a politics of principles and not one of expediency. I call on the Nigerian Catholic politician today to be like St Thomas More, the patron saint of politicians, who confessed publicly that he was “the king's good servant, but God's first.”

REFERENCE LIST

Adasu. I've Come to Baptise Politics (March 31, 2003). This Day News. Retrieved March 1, 2007 from <http://news.biafranigeriaworld.com/archive/2003/mar/31/035.html>

Cassidy, R.J. (2001) Christians and Roman Rule in the New Testament. New York: Crossroad.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. (1998) Catechism on the Church and Politics. Retrieved March 1, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/1990s/1998-church_politics.html.

Code of Canon Law (1983)

Goodman, M. (1993) The Ruling Class of Judaea. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (2004) Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Citta del Vaticano: Liberia Editrice Vaticana.

Vatican II. (1965) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)

Wright, N.T. (2004). God and Caesar, Then and Now. The Character of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Wesley Carr. Ashgate, Aldershot, Hants.

FOUR

Factors that Militate Against the Active Involvement of Christians in Politics and Societal Transformation in Nigeria

By Rev Fr Dr. Bona Ikenna Ugwu, C.S.SP.

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria in its plenary meeting held in Lagos from 23rd to 26th February, 1988 came out with a communiqué which declared “political involvement” as “a sacred mission of service” that every Christian is called to undertake.¹ In other words, political involvement constitutes an essential part of Christian calling. It is a duty which Christians have to do with a view to bringing about a just and ordered society in Nigeria.

Nineteen years after this declaration was made by the bishops, the behaviour of many Christians in Nigeria with regard to politics is still marked by apathy, indifference, negligence and passive involvement. This paper intends to explore, identify and examine the factors that are responsible for this culture of non-involvement of Nigerian Christians in politics.

Before getting into this job proper, we would like to make two important observations. The first is that in Nigeria, attitudes to politics and political behaviour differ significantly according to Christian confessions; Protestants do not approach politics in the same way as Catholics. So, in talking about the attitude or behaviour of Christians in Nigeria there is always the danger of either over generalization or over simplification. In order to avoid or minimize this danger, we would sometimes narrow down our focus to just one Christian denomination, namely, Catholics.²

The second observation is that the history of social transformation in many communities in Nigeria is closely linked

with the activities of one Christian group or the other; for instance, the building of schools, hospitals, and vocational institutes. Christians in Nigeria are not lacking as such in matters of social transformation. Hence, in the discussion that follows, we would be making more references to non-involvement in politics than in societal transformation.³

With these in mind, let us now turn to the fundamental question that concerns us: what are the factors have combined to shape Christians in Nigeria to become predominantly indifferent to active political life? We would take them one after another.

1. Stereotypes and Unhealthy Attitudes about Politics

Ask an average Nigerian today about politics and you will definitely hear such comments as, it is dangerous, it is bad, it is dirty and it is risky. It is not a place or game for the good people. Whoever decides to play politics must decide to be a liar or a crook. Speaking about one of the gubernatorial aspirants in Nigeria, a friend said, "He is too gentle and good to be a politician." Christians share this general impression which people have about politics.

Quite often one hears Christians say that politics should not be brought into the Church. There are complaints, judgment and condemnation when, for example, one campaigns for ecclesiastical offices ranging from the post of the Bishop to the president of the parish council. The elections of new superiors and councilors in religious congregations are usually preceded by a few days retreat and the moderators usually use the opportunity to remind the participants of the need to desist from politicking. These comments and behaviours are pointers to a deep-seated apathy and negative attitude to politics which characterise Nigerians in general and Christians in particular.

This attitude to politics can be traced to a number of factors particularly the way that politics is done in Nigeria. Politicking in

our country is scary: killing, poisoning, character and real assassination, occultisms have become associated with it. There are claims that many politicians belong to secret cults. They use occult powers to fight their way to positions of authority. A good number of them pay frequent visits to traditional medical practitioners where they get not only help to protect themselves but also to harm or destroy anybody that stands on their way. Political leaders surround themselves with tugs, the so called 'boys' who are used to do all kinds of evil in the name of politics.

Party membership and opposition are not understood as differences in visions or opinions but rather as enmity. The Daily Sun of March 16, 2007 has a headline on its back page entitled "Festival of Blood." In this article, the writer decries the bloodshed, violence and clashes that already characterise the party rallies. In fact, "each of the parties has had violent clashes at their campaign rallies which are attributed to their opponents."⁴ These acts are not reconcilable with Christian ways of living. In other words, being a committed Christian and being involved in politics is seen as alternatives.

Besides, people are already disillusioned about politics because the hope which political independence offered the people of Nigeria has remained unfulfilled and politicians have much of the blame.⁵ Christians in Nigeria have to contend with even more problems. Christianity promotes peace founded on justice and also demands from its members a high level of moral uprightness. These values cannot be reconciled with the life of politicians in Nigeria. Hence, "since it would be impossible to live out the high ethical demands of Jesus in the context of corrupt and crises-ridden Nigerian political life, one had better keep off."⁶ Christians try as much as they can to stay clear of trouble and by implication they give up active involvement in politics.⁷ What is more?

2. Politics is not Conceived as a Christian Vocation

Christians believe that God calls people to take up roles in life

which are geared towards the building of the kingdom of heaven. They also hold that there are varieties of vocations which make the riches of the Church more vital and concrete.⁸ As scripture says, some are called to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some teachers. All these different vocations are intended to be at the service of the world. Thus, Christian vocations are intimately connected to the world. Christians are called to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.”⁹ The world is the focus, the recipient, final destination, the field, and the vineyard in which Christians are called to fulfill their mission.¹⁰

Politics does not feature prominently or at all in the list of vocations which Christians are encouraged to undertake. Traditional Christianity divides human activities into two: the spiritual and the temporal. It places emphasis on the spiritual over and above the temporal. Politics is faulted on double counts; it is mundane and it is dirty. Hence, it is not surprising that it is not counted among the desirable vocations for Christians in Nigeria. A typical Christian parent would want their children to be priests or religious sisters, medical doctors, engineers, accountants, bankers but not politicians.

The situation would have been different if we were informed by the insights of Christian thinkers like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin according to whom every human effort no matter how earthly it appears is a vocation insofar as it contributes to the unification of creation with the Creator.¹¹ The same Spirit of God is at work through parents, merchants, researchers, scholars, mystics, priests, social work and politicians. So the time spent at work in the office, in the fields or the factory, in the market or at rallies is as valuable as the time spent in prayer.¹²

3. Spirituality Built on Pessimistic View of the World

Christians see themselves as people living in two worlds, material/temporal and spiritual. The latter is placed above the

former. This conception is beautifully expressed by St Augustine in *The City of God*. In a bid to exalt the value of spirit, matter is defined negatively. In relation to the spiritual, matter is looked upon as “the weight that drags us down, the mire that sucks us in, and the bramble that bars our way.”¹³ The body has to be humiliated and punished so that the spirit can be in control. Its suppression is considered necessary for salvation. The world and the body are negatively considered as burdens for the soul and must be gotten rid of.¹⁴

This understanding of matter or the body gives rise to a type of spirituality that does not accept responsibility for the world. Spirituality in this sense is “characterized by flight from the world...the more the Christian isolates himself from the world, the greater his chances of saving himself.”¹⁵ A type of spirituality which lays emphasis on renunciation, cutting off from the world, and emptying oneself of the old man can hardly bring about a transformation in the society. When such is the case, people are right who say that “religion is an obstacle to the development of the (African) continent.”¹⁶

The attitude of Christians in Nigeria to politics reveals this sort of spirituality which does not express itself in wholeness and integration of all realities including human activities, culture, and politics. Religion is flourishing, so many people are fervent in prayer and devotion, and yet there is no corresponding transformation in the society; it gets worse every day.¹⁷

Scripture says that God the Father loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.¹⁸ The Son too loved the world so much that he gave his life. Then the Holy Spirit loved the world so much that she decided to dwell in it until the end of time. Inasmuch as holiness means being Godlike or Christ-like or Spirit-like, authentic Christian spirituality cannot be anything short of a total commitment of oneself to the benefit of the world. Christians are not keen to be involved in politics because they do not understand

holiness and spirituality in this way.

4. The Kingdom of God and the Church

The passive participation of Christians in politics and societal transformation is also connected with the way they understand the kingdom of God and their relationship to it as followers of Christ. A Christian who comprehends sufficiently the essential characteristics of the kingdom would not fail to play active roles in the drama of politics or societal transformation. The kingdom represents the vision that Jesus Christ came to communicate to the world. It is "for this vision Jesus lived, laboured, suffered and died."¹⁹ The vision of the kingdom could play the role of an explosive force in the historical unfolding of creation because it takes this world and human effort seriously and its goal is the transformation of the universe.

The fact that many Christians do not see the essential link between the kingdom and the world or rather the transformative, social dimension of the kingdom militates against their involvement in both politics and social change. They pray fervently for the coming of the kingdom, they await it yet they do not see its relationship with political involvement.

5. The Position and Role of the Laity in the Nigerian Church Today²⁰

Recently, I was privileged to be at the Bishop Shanahan Foundation Annual Lecture which was held in Enugu (on February 24, 2007). One of the feelings that kept on coming from the people during the reactions that came in response to the lecture was that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is still predominantly Father's Church (clerical). A good number of people were of the view that the laity is not yet empowered sufficiently to see themselves as fully involved in the running of the Church. The power of administration belongs to the clergy and the rest are expected to follow in total obedience.

The Second Vatican Council brought about positive changes in the appreciation of the lay faithful in the Church. They are charged with the responsibility of going into the world in order to transform it.²¹ This ministry is proper to them because they are members of Christ's body who are endowed with gifts by the Holy Spirit.²² Since after the Council, the participation of the laity in the affairs of the Church have increased significantly. For instance, the Laity Council has become a formidable organization in many dioceses in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts to promote the laity, the situation still cries for attention and part of the problem derives from the legislation of the Church itself. For example it stated that "the laity should promptly accept in Christian obedience what is decided by the pastors who as teachers and rulers of the Church represent Christ."²³ In other words, allowing oneself to be led and leaving issues to be decided on one's behalf is fundamental to what it means to be a good Catholic lay faithful.

The point is that political involvement is a learned behaviour and the role of the laity in the Church does not provide them the environment for proper socialization into the art of governance. Politics is "the art of governance, a dynamic process that entails the mobilisation of human and other resources, managing, directing and enforcing the affairs of public policy and decisions towards the regulation of social order."²⁴ So if in the Church, lay people are not trained or allowed to play leadership roles they grow to become indifferent to arts of governance. Such an upbringing as this cannot be overlooked as contributing significantly towards the non-active participation of the faithful in politics.

6. Inadequate Political Education and Awareness of the Clergy

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II states that in order that the lay faithful live out their vocation effectively in the world, they have to be sufficiently

formed spiritually, doctrinally, and in human values. This formation takes place in the families, Churches, schools and universities. The clergy on whom this onus of leadership and teaching in the Church rests are not usually sufficiently educated in political matters. Their level of political awareness is questionable.

Seminary formation does not explicitly include training in the art of politics. The Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, stipulates that every candidate for the priesthood should study philosophy and theology. No mention is made of politics. However, it is said that "philosophical subjects should be taught in such a way as to lead the student to a solid and consistent knowledge of man, the world and God."²⁵ A balanced and adequate comprehension of human beings and the world presupposes some modicum of political awareness or knowledge. So, one could say that by implication Vatican II recommends that seminarians should be introduced to the science and art of governance and of management during their training.

In the meantime, it is not just that the clergy are not allowed to become actively involved in partisan politics but that they lack sufficient political awareness which in turn tend to make them indifferent to it. One should not forget that the lay faithful are encouraged not only to collaborate, obey and support their priests but also to take them as models. What priests do, the values they live by and teach affect their flock. So when the clergy are poor in political consciousness, those are asked to emulate them (the laity) would not be expected to be very zealous towards the transformation of the world by politics.

7. The Western Influence on Christianity

Africans inherited an already Westernised Christianity. Hence, the history of the West shaped and has continued to shape the Church in every part of our continent. In the meantime, the political ideology of the Western Church is characterised by

separation between the Church and the State.²⁶ In his encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI affirms that one of the fundamental characteristics of Christianity is “the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God, in other words, the distinction between Church and State or as the Second Vatican Council puts it, the autonomy of the temporal sphere.”²⁷ This was the type of Church that missionaries brought to Africa.

In Nigeria, this ideology of separation was reinforced by the attitude of apathy and indifference to politics which came through the Irish missionaries. Surely, “scholars have tried to show some link between the ill-disposition of many Nigerian Christians towards politics and the long-standing Irish anti-pathy for British oppression and domination back home....This Irish anti-pathy was unobtrusively foisted on Nigerian disciples and wards and has subconsciously been influencing their political behaviour.”²⁸ Catholics got the better share of this Irish patrimony because most of the missionaries who evangelised Nigeria came from Ireland.

The missionaries are gone but the legacy that they left remains with us. Hence, the autonomy of the State and Church continues to be understood as separation and Christians try to live fulfilled lives without caring much about what happens in the political realm.

8. Inferiority Complex or Feeling of Inadequacy by Christians

The book of Judges (Chapters 6-8) tells the story of a certain warrior called Gideon. He was a man of valour yet he lived like a coward. His country, Israel was living under bondage imposed by the Midianites. The people of Israel could not even grow crops to feed themselves because each time they did it their enemy would come and have them trampled under feet; thus they subjected them to the torture of hunger. One day, an angel came to Gideon to convince him that with his strength, he could lead Israel to

liberation. After a long debate and trial, he accepted the message and indeed through him, the story of his nation changed from bondage to freedom.

When one thinks of Christians in Nigeria and their attitude to politics, the picture of Gideon readily comes to mind. In the first place, their non participation in politics in Nigeria is closely connected with some kind of fear, feeling of inadequacy and or inferiority complex.²⁹

As it is already noted, politics in Nigeria is taken to be 'dirty', 'risky' and 'dangerous' and Nigerian politicians are deadly people too. They do horrible things in the name of politics. Getting into politics raises the question of life and death, of security of life and property, of approval and or rejection. Any Christian that wants to get involved in politics would first address these questions and have them are settled. Unfortunately, after weighing the things involved in delving into politics, many Christians choose to withdraw out of fear. In the face of threats from politicians, Christians tend to retreat and go into hiding like Gideon. Sometimes they try to spiritualise their flight as acts of Christian resignation or non violence as preached by Christ. This is unfortunate because there is power in Christianity which Christians have not realised.

The Holy Spirit: This fear and feeling of inferiority in the face of the lords of this world reveal the ignorance of Christians about the power of God, the Holy Spirit who dwells not just in creation but in them as in temples. This is the power from on high on which prophetic witnessing is grounded.³⁰ Besides ignorance, this power has been neglected by many Christians and the consequences are what we see today in the form of fear, timidity and feeling of inferiority. The early Christians who faced even more terrible oppositions were victories because as St John rightly puts it they knew that "he who is in us is greater than he

who is in the world.”³¹ Until Christians arrive at this point of realization which drives out fear, they will continue to shy away from active participation in politics.

Conclusion

Our reflection has brought us to a point where we can conclude that there are many factors that militate against Christians in Nigeria from actively participating in politics and societal transformation. Getting Christians in Nigeria to be actively involved in politics is not something that would be achieved simply by a communiqué from the Conference of Bishops. Not even this symposium or similar types of discussions which are being organised today at different levels of the Church will be enough to change the attitude and behaviour of Nigerian Christians towards politics and the world.

As long as politics is considered as dirty and is not even included in the list of Christian vocations; as long as Christians' view of the world is pessimistic and their spirituality remains rooted on it, as long as the lay faithful are not empowered sufficiently to govern, and Christians are afraid to stand up and meet other players in the world drama, they will continue to shy away from politics. Moreover, without active involvement in politics, their role in the transformation of society will be highly limited.

Therefore, Christians need to be transformed in order to transform the nation through active involvement in politics and societal projects. Serious work is demanded to decode what many years of socialization has instilled in Christians. Parents, teachers and priests should all join hands together making use of catechesis, seminars, homilies, and formal classes in institutions to achieve this goal. Thank God that this process has started of which this symposium counts as one of the major steps in the right direction.

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. Communiqué, no. 7.
2. Many people would agree that in relation to other Christian denominations, Catholics appear to epitomize more the non-involvement in political matters.
3. These two realities are essentially connected because politics is a major tool for social transformation.
4. Cf. p. 48.
5. Cf. C.I. Ejizu, "Ethics of Politics in Nigeria: the Christian Perspective", in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 2 (1, 1989), 46.
6. C.I. Ejizu, *ibid.*
7. But even if we accept the fact that politics is dangerous and dirty, does this negate what Ejizu calls "the crucial significance of politics in human life in general or in the continued fortunes of this country in particular"? (*Bulletin*, p.46).
8. Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful, Christifideles Laici*, no. 118.
9. Matthew 5, 13-14.
10. Cf. *Christifideles Laici*, no. 3.
11. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin: an Essay on the Interior Life* (tr. B. Wall et al). London: William Collins, 1960, 91.
12. Cf. B.I.Ugwu, *The Holy Spirit as Present and Active in Cosmic Turmoil and Human Suffering: A Dialogue between Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Jurgen Moltmann*, Rome: Gregorian University, 2004, 103 where the author discusses these ideas.
13. B.I.Ugwu, *ibid.* 102-103.
14. This pessimistic view of the world and of the body was inherited from the West who brought us Christianity. Cf. Uzukwu, *Bulletin*, 38.

15. H.C. Pacana, "A New Look at Christian Spirituality" in *The Furrow* 20 (7, 1969), 355.
16. E.E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996, 26. The bracket is mine.
17. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council note that "one of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives." Cf. GS 43. This is what we find in the life of Christians in Nigeria today as far as religiosity and societal transformation is concerned.
18. Cf. John 3,16.
19. J. Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: the Message of Jesus Today*, Maryknoll: N.Y., Orbis Books, 1995, 15.
20. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* no.31 where it is said that "the term laity is understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church."
21. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31; *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.
22. Cf. Giovanni Magnani, "Does the So-Called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?" in R. Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. I, N.Y/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989, 568-633.
23. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 37.
24. C.I. Ejizu, "Ethics of Politics in Nigeria", 47.
25. Vatican II, Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, no. 15.
26. Cf. E.E. Uzukwu, "Church-State Relations in the Early Church and the Crises facing the Christian Church in Nigeria" in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 2 (1, 1989), 31-45 where the author traces the history of this Western ideology of separation between the Church and the State.
27. Pope Benedict XVI, *Desu Caritas Est*, no. 28.
28. C.I. Ejizu, "Ethics of Politics in Nigeria", 47.
29. Cf. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the*

Participation of Catholics in Political Life, 2003, no. 7 where Christians are reminded that they should not succumb to any kind of "inferiority complex" in the face of political systems or their players.

30. Cf. Acts of the Apostles 1,8 where it is clearly indicated that after the Ascension, Jesus instructed his disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they have been clothed with power from above. Only then could they go out to become his witnesses to the ends of the world.

31. 1 John 4,4.

FIVE

The Church and the State in Nigeria: Partners in Dialogue Towards a Better Nation

Rev. Fr. Dr. Chukwudi Anthony Njoku

1. Introduction

Appreciation: I would like to begin by thanking the organizers of this symposium for their thoughtfulness in choosing *Politics, Social Change and the Church in Nigeria*, as the theme for this year's event. It is very relevant, tallying as it does with the current situation in our country, with elections, campaigns and such serious matters filling the air everywhere you look, raising fears, heightening tensions and forcing us all to re-appraise the journey so far in our political life as a nation. I am happy to be part of this brainstorming gathering.

Importance of the theme: The topic that has been proposed to me, namely, *The Church and State in Nigeria: Partners in Dialogue Towards a Better Nation*, is an exciting one and permits one to focus on an issue at the heart of holistic development in a Nation such as ours, namely: a post-colonial African nation; a populous nation made up of about 140 million people and therefore, even if potentially, is equipped with enormous human resources; a nation that has more than its fair share of endowments by mother nature and therefore potentially rich with oil and many other minerals; a nation with more than 250 languages and ethnicities (some say more than 500 languages and ethnicities);¹ and a nation where the three main religions that have come to be associated with Africa, namely, African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity, have ample adherents.² It is also unique in this regard that Nigeria is one of those few places where there is a near parity in the population of adherents of Islam and Christianity respectively, with its great potentiality for crisis

along religious lines, especially given the almost North - South geo-social divide evident in the demographic distribution of adherents to the two religious groups respectively.³ There is also the fact that rather than be a monolithic group, each of the two religions in Nigeria are invariably heterogeneous in their character and leaning. To focus on Christianity, Nigeria is a nation with over 1,000 different churches- and is fast becoming a major source of a certain brand of Christian religious fellowship that has started having important outposts in many parts of the Diaspora.⁴ A visit to Lagos or indeed any of the major cities will drive home this message.

There is hardly any history of any nation since the Greeks wrote down theirs that does not pay attention to what is classically now known as "Church and State relations." The question of religion as an intimate part of the human being has long been noted by early thinkers and philosophers. Of Africans it has been noted that religion is at the heart of their every activity.⁵ Any society that does not factor in the issue of the religious dimension of the life of its citizens cannot be said to be serious about their overall welfare. It is therefore not surprising that all the major historians from Herodotus, Josephus, to Pliny, the younger, down to our own Adiele Afigbo have given ample space to discussing the intermingling of Church and State or better put the relationship between the State and the Religious affiliations of its citizens. On account of its importance I will dwell briefly on this clarification of terms.

The phrase "Church and State Relations" seems to have stuck with most discussions of this theme. But the more accurate thing should be "The State and the Religious Affiliations of its Citizens" to factor in those religions that are not Christian. What the phrase 'Church and State Relations' retains is the Western Origin of the discourse. But here-in also lies its weakness and limitation, namely that it is not comprehensive enough and indeed isolates other religions as if they do not count in the

scheme of things. This in-built discrimination and unqualified hierarchical ordering of religions already poses a problem in using the term to fruitfully engage the issue of religion of the citizens vis-à-vis the State. In this paper we use the phrase simply respecting the classical phrase in the field but with an eye at the wider field covered by the general theme. The reader should, therefore, be aware that there is a wider field at play in our discussion for our context is not just Christian, given our triple religious heritage. Certainly, the presence of Moslems in such a great percentage in our country requires such a wider field of discourse.

To return to the perennial place given to the theme of Church and State by both civil and ecclesiastical historians, what this underlines is the crucial importance of the theme of Church and State. A healthy balance in the relationship between these two major poles of influence in the life of human beings living in any given community is crucial for its holistic development and stability. The need for robust Church and State relations is predicated on the mutual importance and pre-eminence of the two forces in any given society.

Church and State are two powerful institutions that need to understand each other, otherwise they have the capacities to undermine and seriously injure one another if not out rightly destroy each other. The State, for instance, has firm hold of political power and civil authority. The State has control of legal institutions and instruments as well as possesses great economic and financial clout. The State is therefore in a position to mobilize its intimidating apparatus against the Church if it so wishes.

The Church on the other hand is also a very powerful institution. It has firm hold on the religious imagination and world view of its faithful. Control of a people's world view is an enormous power because so many actions and reactions, even socio-cultural

reflexes depend heavily on a people's world view.

For example, the idea of heaven and hell is a religious concept and the fear of hell or the love of heaven is vital in the control of behavior, especially moral behavior. A religion that promises its adherents admittance into heaven for certain acts classified as martyrdom is in a position to control behavior of such adherents in a way that would fascinate people who do not share such faith. This ability of religions to shape the worldview of their faithful is an enormous power and indeed gives them great capacity to oppose the State precisely because they can mobilize the people against the State.

The Church is so well-positioned and networked, especially at the grass roots level, such that if need be, it can sustain for a long time, guerrilla warfare with the State, if it chooses. In its own way, the Church has access to a certain sure flow of funds, from its faithful to sustain her work. In addition, most churches have a wider network of friends and sympathizers around the nation or indeed around the world. This is very true for example with regard to the Catholic Church. This universal church would definitely not stand by and watch while its sister church is being persecuted. It will do 'something' in solidarity. That "something" would at least create uncomfortable diplomatic relations for the State.

In a way therefore, the mutual capacities, both positive and negative that the two institutions have is akin to two countries that have nuclear war capacities. Each knows that any show down with the other is a deadly affair. Positively, it is akin to a husband and wife, who are aware that any conflict between them would create enormous problems for, at least, their children. Most States that have achieved average stability and growth have therefore had to deal constructively, and successfully, with the perennial issue of Church and State Relations. The roles of both institutions are complimentary.

Central Thesis explored in the paper: In our own case, part of my submission is that, for the moment at least, Church and State relations in Nigeria is both complicated and confused. This is so without prejudice to the declaration in our constitution that Nigeria is a secular State, a declaration that indeed points to the awareness of the founding Fathers of the Nigerian entity of the multi-religious landscape of the country and the potential problems this reality poses to the stability and well-being of the country. The declaration that Nigeria is a secular State was therefore a wise way of dealing decisively, at least theoretically, with the potential conflict inherent in the peopling of the country with citizens with diverse religious affiliations. The history of our nation has shown that this “quick patch approach” is not even enough to paper the problem.

This complicated and confused nature of Church and State Relations in Nigeria is so, in great part, because of the peculiar history of the Nigerian State as well as the lingering legacy of the way and manner in which Christianity has been introduced into the country. Nevertheless, this state of affairs is more a challenge than a source for despair, for willy nilly, the Nigerian Nation, as it is presently constituted, has come to stay, and, barring any dramatic developments in the near future, would remain so for a long time to come. It is therefore necessary for all the stake holders in the Nigerian Nation to work assiduously towards improving the Church and State relations in Nigeria. It is a work that has no readymade formulas, no easy solutions, no short cuts except the way of experience, grappling each day with the criss-crossing issues of Church and State, and carefully laying down the rules, setting up the legal instruments to ensure that our painful experiences are not repeated. Models and solutions borrowed from elsewhere must be submitted to the rigid test of our contextual peculiarities. They must not be swallowed hook line and sinker. They must be deconstructed, made to face our own questions, our own concerns and unique situations. To be really beneficial to us, they must be adjusted and moderated to

speak directly and honestly to our aspirations before being adopted. Nigeria cannot be repeated elsewhere in the world. Our uniqueness imposes a duty on us to find homegrown solutions after rigorous brainstorming on the issues that confront us.

Approach Adopted in the paper: My approach is to first of all expose the historical reasons why this relationship is presently both complicated and confused. Without such a history, we would be dealing with artificial problems. History enables us to get to the heart of our problem. Secondly, I would make the case for why this relationship needs to be improved. Thirdly, I would offer suggestions towards this improvement. In this third segment, I would be borrowing from the circumstances and lessons of other nations that have over time managed their own Church State Relations very well such that theirs could be said to be robust and healthy for the overall development of their own nations. In doing so, however, attention has been paid to the need to contextualize whatever models we might consider to ensure that it is realistic to the peculiar circumstances of the Nigerian Nation and therefore have good chances of indeed working *for us*.

2. Church and State in Nigeria: Faulted Beginnings

Nigeria, as is well known, is a post-colonial African State. This has numerous implications. First, the various entities that make up what is now known as Nigeria did not come together by mutual agreement but were brought together by external forces, in our case, by Britain. Secondly, and following from the first almost naturally, the boundaries were drawn without reference either to the people themselves or to their cultural and religious differences and affiliations. This has made many thinkers, including Nigerians themselves, to categorize Nigeria as an artificial State. One of the founding Fathers of the Nigerian Nation, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, of blessed Memory, even called it “a geographical expression,” a characterization that in spite of its realism brought him numerous critics. In spite of the

idealistic variety that it carries within its folds, the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature of Nigeria, as constituted, makes the task of nation building much more challenging. In spite of our many failings as a nation, the great joy is that gradually some dream men and women are appearing on the scene with robust patriotic vision and are progressively rising courageously above the attractions of ethnic chauvinism and partisanship, the lures of nepotism, the many pleasures that corruption offers to its champions and fans and are leading the task of bringing the many disparities into "one nation, one Destiny." They are yet to form the vital critical mass necessary for all to see what is unfolding but we are slowly but surely getting there.

With specific reference to Church State relations, in spite of the declaration that Nigeria is a Secular State, its many leaders from the Civilians to the Military have hardly exhibited that restraint that should make them treat each religious group fairly without undue focus and preferential treatment of their own particular religious affiliation. The old adage that says, 'the religion of the king is the religion of the people' holds in our context albeit with very interesting features. The most striking is that since in Nigeria we do not have a monarchical form of government piloted by a ruling royal family, with a particular stable religious leaning, each leader becomes the champion of his/her own religion and within particular religions, even denomination/sect, the same thing goes. It is this very fact that has radicalized the religious factor in our national politics. Beyond the question, 'where does he come from?', the other most important partisan question in considering who to elect into public office is: 'what is his/her religious affiliation?' 'Where does he/she worship?' 'Is he/she a member of our church?'

The multi-religious nature of the Nigerian entity complexifies the religio-political scene in the country. It is difficult for the State to deal with one religion with its plethora of demands. The task of

the State is further aggravated when it has to contend with numerous dialogue partners, especially when these diverse representatives of various religions are not of the same voice or indeed of the same opinion on any given point. It is a little bit like a polygamous marriage setting: 'One husband, several wives', each of the wives demanding attention and care. Is it any wonder that like the metaphorical polygamous family setting, the State (seen here as Husband), can opt to be indifferent or partial at one time or the other, with one or the other wife, all in the bid to survive a difficult situation. This variegated nature of the religious demography in our country, Nigeria, is partly responsible for relativism being the rule rather than the exception in the manner in which Church and State Relation is carried on in different parts of the country.

In the Northern part of Nigeria where Islam is dominant, any government in place has to factor in the dominant mental set in the religious imagination of Moslems, namely, that Theocracy rather than Democracy or indeed any other form of Government is the expectation of even the people being governed. In this context, it is easier to sympathize with the States where the Sharia Law has been introduced in the North of Nigeria. It is also easy to see why the voice of the Emir, who doubles as both political leader and spiritual leader in Islamic way of ordering their lives, is such a strong voice, for indeed under theocracy, is it not akin to the voice of God?

Similarly in the South where Christianity is dominant, the political Leaders respect heavily the Christian Leaders such as Bishops, but the level of allegiance and patronage differs from place to place, especially in view of the changing denomination of the changing political leadership incumbencies.

These challenges are part of the fallouts of what we inherited from Our British Colonial masters when in 1914, Lord Lugard, Amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form

what is today Nigeria. They remain challenges to be critically and dispassionately explored so that homegrown solutions are evolved that attend effectively to our peculiar situation.

3. Borrowed Models

Another Problem is one of borrowed models. Since Independence in 1960 the system of governance adopted in Nigeria has always been borrowed, whether it is the parliamentary or the Presidential systems. Even Military dictatorship is a foreign system, at least to most parts of Nigeria, especially those ethnicities that prior to the Advent of Europeans on our soil were never empire seeking. This borrowing syndrome has not allowed us to fashion out something that we can really call our own system, whose rules we make and understand and therefore can in most cases respect. We have allowed ourselves to be inserted into other peoples' motion, other peoples' game, without understanding or deeply absorbing its whys, its rules and its vital procedures and decorum. While borrowing is in our times is unavoidable, to be relevant and effective it must be contextualized.

The area of Church and State falls into this borrowing syndrome. We have borrowed a term that took the West centuries to evolve after numerous experiences peculiar to their own history and environment. We have transplanted it into our context, without factoring in the peculiarities of our own country, its history, its numerous religious groups as well as its diverse cultures, including political cultures. We therefore have a State that we are yet to own, that we are yet to appropriate as our own. Such a State that is seemingly soulless is not the best positioned to deal with a Church that is also a recent phenomenon in the Nigerian Landscape.

By accepting the Nigerian State as created without at least the symbolic act of re-tracing its boundaries or seeking mutual post-colonial consent for its membership by the various ethnicities

that were forcibly brought together by the British, we swept under the carpet the question of whether these peoples' really want to be part of this bigger entity or not. This lingering lack of consent has made each group to at best tolerate one another. This enduring atmosphere of mutual suspicion is not conducive for a robust Church and State relations in Nigeria.

Having said that, it is also important to point out that there are lee ways out of this state of affairs. Equity and justice in the distribution of power and resources is one very crucial. This has both a Federal and a State dimension. Over the years the federal government has been doing its level best to deal with the question of sharing power and resources of the country equitably. Each State in each ethnicity has a duty to complement this gesture by putting into good use whatever resources so far allocated to their people. It is well known that some corrupt State governments cry wolf and wipe up ethnic sentiments about marginalization when they themselves have not even tried to be honest to their own people by maximally deploying the allocations that flow in from the federal government to their State and people. They hoodwink their people and selfishly cart away what should have been properly invested into improving the welfare of their people and therefore further cementing their loyalty to the Nigerian State. The church ought not to join or approve of this type of dishonest local State leadership, bent on deceiving the people. On the contrary, for the general good, the church domiciled in these States should be in the fore front of urging such corrupt local State leadership to mend their ways.

3. Pillarisation: Legacy from the Missionaries

The lingering effects of the phenomenon of pillarisation brought into our country by the Christian missionaries, particularly the Irish is another problem facing the development of robust Church and State Relation in our country. Pillarisation is that phenomenon where the local church operated as an independent entity, feeling completely without need of the State. The church

had a certain feeling of self-sufficiency, of 'I can do it alone', especially with deep sentiments of scorn and even of sense of superiority over the State. By so doing the Church operated as a quasi-State within a State, with any need to refer to the State. Pillarisation of church and State, especially as practiced in Nigeria, is the equivalent of Apartheid, that is, "separate development", of parallel lines that do not meet, of a certain mutual indifference arising either from self-sufficiency or mutual scorn.

In spite of the good work they did among the peoples they evangelized, the Irish missionaries, carried over with them, a huge baggage of resentment against the British,⁶ or better put against the English, who dominated the politics of Great Britain for more than five centuries following the dethronement of Mary Queen of the Scots. This dominance of the English was extended beyond the shores of Great Britain to include Ireland, whom they colonized. The colonization of Ireland by the British was carried out with a heavy dose of Sectarian division of the Irish People along Catholic and Protestant (nay, Anglican Lines) and with such punitive measures as forcibly taking away land that belonged to Catholics and giving them to Protestant lackeys of the British invaders.⁷ Nothing in the history of the Irish so divided their country as this event, which lingered for decades. Besides Famine, nothing else in their history forced the Irish People to migrate in large numbers to other lands to escape persecution. It is also this painful part of their history that made the Irish to identify with Catholicism almost as a national identity marker.⁸ It is therefore not easy to exaggerate the hatred which the Irish had for the British, especially for the English. The British on their part had undiluted scorn for the Irish People. When the Irish Missionaries under Shanahan took over the leadership of the Holy Ghost Missionaries working in Southern Nigeria in 1905, Ireland was still under British colonization. It will be another 10 years, in 1916, that the Irish gained their Independence from Britain. But the sour relations between the two was carried over

to the African Colonies wherever the Irish and the British had to meet and work together.

Irish Missionaries did not want anything to do with a people, namely, the British, who had given them and their ancestors such a raw deal at home, impoverishing them, making them less than second class citizens in their own homes. Irish Missionaries therefore, as much as possible, operated as independent entities, with as little reference to the British colonial administrators as possible. They set up mission schools, hospitals and such other outlets for the evangelization. They raised their own funds, especially by campaigning at home in Ireland periodically.⁹

Naturally they taught their wards, their converts, to have the same aloof attitude towards the British Colonial Administration. It is this phenomenon of a certain historically justified but rather naïve sense of self-sufficiency, a certain structurally adopted attitude of "Government, I do not need you!" that they transmitted to our pioneer Catholics. While the Colonial regime lasted, while the missionary endeavor, with its antenna facing the outside world both for funds and inspiration and reference/returns lasted, this system of pillarisation seemed okay. But once Nigeria became Independent of the British, the numerous problems associated with the system of pillarisation, submerged under the Irish missionaries because of their strong external links, began to come to the surface. If the Irish and the British were both strangers to Nigeria, they could very well afford such rivalry carried over from their home fronts. What was the justification for the indigenous leaders of the local church to carry on with the same spirit of estrangement and deep suspicion for the political leaders of their own country? How could they afford to operate as if they were a government unto themselves? Was it wise to keep asking for funds and such help from outside their own country while failing to argue for and tap from the local resources under the control of their own political leadership? Is the continuation of the system of pillarisation, this feeling of self-

sufficiency, really helpful in the demanding and challenging tasking of carrying out the varied apostolate of the church within the local church? Are the people divided, one Christian, the other political?

In spite of these glaring questions some of the leaders of the local church are yet to do away with that old mentality of immediately seeing the State as its enemy and have put themselves in a state of seemingly permanent cold war and opposition with the State and its official representatives. This type of mindset, unfortunately ingrained in most of our church leaders, is hardly conducive for developing a robust Church and State Relation. It is one full of prejudice. It is also one that does not allow the Church to be as involved as it should be in what is happening in Government and to be in helpful dialogue with it. Nor does it allow the church to be a critical partner with the State in the task of nation building. It is a mindset that focuses too lopsidedly on the heavenly destiny of the church while ignoring her earthly vocation, namely, that of enabling the realization of the prayer, "thy Kingdom come on Earth as in Heaven". It is a mindset that does not allow members of the church to discharge fruitfully the political dimension of their religious life. Post-colonial nations, such as Nigeria, have an intimidating task of nation building and the church ought to be an intimate part of the struggle to forge a nation that the hitherto disparate, diverse peoples with numerous socio-political and religious cultures and orientations would deeply identify with and be proud of. Embracing pillarisation hardly enables the church to take on this very crucial role.

4. The Military in Nigerian Politics: Residue of Influence on Church and State Relations in Nigeria

Another problem facing the development of a robust church and State Relation in Nigeria is the long legacy of Military rule. Beyond the brief period of Military rule between 1965 and 1967, the longest period of military rule in Nigeria was from 1970 to 1979 and between 1983 and 1999. From 1970 onwards,

following the defeat of Biafra, military power was in the hands of Northerners who were mostly Muslim. The constitutions were suspended and the preferential treatment of one religion over others in Nigeria reached its peak during this period with the unhidden endorsement of Islam by the powers that be at the time. The most brazen act in this regard was the induction of Nigeria as a member of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) by the Babangida regime. This act made rubbish of the declared status of Nigeria as a secular State. It was that move that forced the various Christian Denominations, led by the Catholic Church, to come together under the canopy of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), to fight for their rights as one bloc. The memory of that brazen act, carried out with impunity, has continued to negatively affect the development of Church and State Relations in Nigeria. It has also radicalized Nigerian Politics along religious lines. People really want to know if the leader is going to be Muslim or Christian, to ensure their religious rights are not trampled upon.

The advent of a Civilian regime, since May 1999, in spite of its many twists and turns, holds great promise essentially because of the gradual restoration of the rule of law. Hopefully, through the agency of the three arms of governance, the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary, the secular option of the Nigerian State might begin to take on flesh and be better defined and respected.

5. The Advent of the Pentecostals and its Influence on Church and State Relations: Fragmentation Unlimited

A new and significant element that further problematises the question of Church and State Relation in Nigeria is the recent explosion in the number of Christian denominations in the country. The advent of Pentecostals in Nigeria is such that it appears that the Christian Church is in a permanent State of Fragmentation. For literally everyday new sign boards, signposts

and billboards are appearing proclaiming the birth of new churches. Whether this is a happy development spiritually or not is beside the point in our present discourse. What is clear is that it makes it difficult for the Christian Church to form one strong dialogue partner with the State. It weakens even CAN. Mutual respect for one another among these various Christian denominations is imperative even for the credibility of one another. This *iso anya*, this “let- me- avoid- being -seen –as- full- of -superiority -complex”, leads to dangerous compromises over time in the leadership of a group such as CAN. For these different Christian sects definitely do not have allegiance to the same doctrines, do not have the same levels of values, and *do have* different agenda on the political and economic fronts! A dilemma is unavoidable. Will the Catholic Church go it alone? All the time? With such a plethora of voices from the various churches, whose Voice would the State Listen to? Who will be its vital dialogue partners?

Our flagging up of these selected problems facing the development of robust Church and State relations in Nigeria is not meant to dampen our spirits. Rather its aim is to highlight the complex and complicated nature of the issue as far as Nigeria is concerned. It is meant therefore to provide food for thought so that we can stare hard and long at the problem and feel our way through the sensitive issues at play in our particular situation. One way out is to begin to see areas of convergence in the roles of the Church and the State.

6. Areas of Convergence of Roles of Church and State

Key to creating a robust Church and State Relation in Nigeria is an appreciation of their mutual benefits to the welfare of the society. The State needs the church. The church needs the State. The citizens need both the Church and the State. This need of the citizens for both institutions is different in some ways and converges in others. But even in the areas of difference, we are not dealing with radical difference but complimentary difference

in much the same way as we can say of males and females, to stick to the gender metaphor, or Father and Mother, to borrow parental metaphor. A child needs both parents for unique yet mutually re-enforcing reasons.

Some of these areas of convergence in the roles which the Church and the state perform for their citizens are provision of Education and healthcare. Education is used here in its richest form to refer to holistic education. It is both the acquisition of skills: linguistic, cultural and technical, as well as the moral and ethical formation of subjects of education. Education is an expensive project even though very necessary. Church and State can combine their resources, human, material and spiritual to ensure that their citizens receive well-rounded education. In some parts of the world the State funds education while the Church plays a prominent role in managing its educational institutions. The church can and has traditionally set up schools most of which have turned out to be model schools/ educational institutions. It is perhaps important to remind ourselves that some of the best educational institutions in the world today, whether it is Oxford, Cambridge, Louvain, Gregorian, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, George Town or Loyola, to mention just a few were first and foremost church institutions. Here at home the Loyola School in Abuja, where the powers that be and the very rich in our country send their wards to be educated, is a Church institution. Education of the citizens is a *sine qua non* for holistic development and vital for the proper practice of democracy. Both Church and State must be involved in this crucially important enterprise. Besides their intellectual and technical competence, schools run by the Church ought to be distinguished by the quality of character formation and discipline that the students acquire while passing through these schools. The church has a rich experience in this area and therefore ought to make this experience have a positive impact on the society.

The fear of the State here with regard to active participation of the Church in education is that of indoctrination of those who attend church schools especially in view of the secular option of the State. Add to this the fact that even the doctrines taught increasingly differ with the emergence of new churches singing different tunes. This is not an easy matter to deal with. But it is important to underline, especially with regard to the Catholic Church that I am familiar with, that it is really those doctrines of the church that underpin its disciplinary practices and cannot be dispensed with for mere political expediency. Having said that, an all out religious indoctrination as something that dominates the curricula of church schools should be avoided. Virtue stands in the middle we are told.

In this area the church has the task of arguing for state support using the necessary legal instruments and procedures. Since we are practicing democracy, the rule of law is crucial and efforts should be made to reach legally binding agreements with the State in this regard.

Health Care is another area of convergence of roles by both Church and State. Since the advent of Jesus the church has always prized the health apostolate, especially for the underprivileged in the society. The missionaries used the medical apostolate effectively in their evangelization.¹⁰ The church has invested heavily in training out manpower (and woman power!) in this area. Perhaps more than the State agencies, the church establishes medical outreaches to the grassroots because it has personnel highly motivated by their spiritual vows and orientation to take on such unpopular and little paying tasks. The State ought to tap into this abundant goodwill for mutual good by supporting the church financially and otherwise to carry out its medical mission since this tallies very well also with the mission of the State for the welfare of the citizens.

The area of human rights is another one of convergence. Both the Church and State have a stake in ensuring that the society is a just one, that citizens are treated fairly and with equity. It is therefore important that they collaborate to realize this ongoing goal and aspiration in the country.

7. Towards a Robust Relationship Between Church and State: Roles of Church and State

As I have tried to argue, the key to the creation of a robust relationship between Church and State is a realization by both that they need each other, that both are complimentary institutions, that they enrich and fulfill one another. This is captured in the Igbo saying, *Aka nri kwoo aka ikpa, Aka Ikpa Akwoo aka nri* (For proper washing to take place the right hand washes the left hand and the left hand washes the right hand). Reciprocity, mutual respect, one for the other, is critical. The Post-conciliar Vatican II document *Catechesi Tradendae*, captures this idea very well when it talks about *Shared but differentiated responsibilities*. This is a primary principle in understanding Church State relations. The church has its role to play and the State has also its unique role to play in ensuring that their common goals and aspirations are realized.

7.1 Role of the Church

One of the most basic roles which the church has to play with respect to the State is to be prophetic. This is its teaching or magisterial role. The church is there as a look out, as a gadfly, as a watchman, as keeper of the gate of morals and good conduct. It does this primarily by its own exemplary life and conduct. Otherwise its words would be empty. It is important to keep in mind what Late Pope John Paul II said in this regard, that the world no longer listens to Teachers but to witnesses. If the world listens to Teachers it is also because they are witnesses. Another writer puts it cryptically, “what you are speaks so loudly, I do not hear what you say”. The church's prophetic role is effective to the extent that the church is *Ekwueme*, to the extent that the church is

a good and living example of what it preaches. The second movement is to do like Jesus, namely, to teach, "What I have done to you (washing your feet) do unto others" (John 13: 12 – 15).

The prophetic role imposes an obligation on the church to know, to improve its knowledge. It cannot be carried out effectively taking a departure from ignorance or relying heavily on *argumentum ad baculum* or indeed merely, *argumentum ad misericordia*.¹¹ It has to be hinged on sound reasoning (philosophy) and proper grounding in theology (that is, "faith seeking understanding", according to St. Anselm.)

It has also to be based not on mere abstract theory but on concrete facts. Facts are sacred. The church, that is, its personnel must be aware of what is going on by reading the Newspapers, listening to the various media, local, national and international to keep abreast of developments. Outdated information, anachronistic knowledge, *Amamife tara nchara or gbara uka*, is counterproductive for one who wants to play the prophetic role. It makes him or her irrelevant, out of tune with life and current events. It also therefore eats away the voice of the prophet. The prophet knows and feels deeply in his person what he knows. It is from that disturbing knowledge, that uncomfortable awareness, that pain-filled yet rigorous social analysis that the prophet speaks and so speaks powerfully and with authority, both moral authority and the authority of the facts. It is only by being well-informed that the church can be on the side of the Truth, for Truth is coherence with the granite facts.

Another crucial role of being a prophet is to be objective, no matter whose Ox is gored. If there is need to reproach the rich why not? If there is need to reproach the poor why not? Sometimes we make the mistake of assuming that the poor are innocent angels without sin, always being persecuted. But as Gustavo Gutiérrez, acclaimed the father of Liberation Theology, has himself pointed out, the poor can be terrible, can be cunning,

can be wicked, can be very partial because they are human. The prophetic church even though it makes a preferential option for the poor because of their easy vulnerability ought to rebuke the poor when it is necessary to bring them back into line with the dictates of the gospel. When the rich are doing well this ought to be acknowledged. A Prophet is not always like Jeremiah, sometimes he is like Isaiah, consoling and forecasting a new dawn, the birth of the messiah. If the church abuses its prophetic role, it might end up having merely a nuisance value and lose the ears of the State. Constant opposition, lack of appreciation of complexities of governance, chronic pessimism, these tendencies can injure the capacity of the church to enter into proper dialogue with the State.

The church can help the State to deal with crisis and Disasters (as was the case in the New Orleans Flood), to heal social and public wounds (as was the case in the Clinton/ Monica saga). During the air crash disasters we had recently in the country, the Church played such roles effectively, to restore faith and hope and self-confidence.

The church has the duty of unceasingly catering for the moral formation of the citizens, “in season and out of season”, using the varied media and technology that has been developed. Whether it is via radio, newspapers, Television, the websites or whatever else the progressive march of communication technology throws up that could help to reach people wherever they may be. It is not something reserved only for Sundays, from the pulpit. This means engaging in debates, in conferences, in seminars, and so on, to keep God in the forefront, to keep the values of the church before all eyes and ears, to strengthen those who are engaged in all kinds of difficult work bordering on conscience. The voice of the church is golden and must not be wasted or hoarded. It has to be out there helping all “to grow in love.” This work is helped if the church does not become accomplices of evil. The church should discipline herself and her faithful and indeed her

ministers. Self reformation and discipline is important for effectively being a gadfly. The church should not by its own commissions or omissions lose her voice or her moral authority. The church should avoid scandals and when scandals do arise, she should deal with them in an honest and matured way. Apologize, even publicly, when the circumstances call for it. Allow the law to take its cause to avoid setting terribly injurious precedents. Impose sanctions where necessary. Do not forget compassion. The Church should forgive as its Lord and Master Jesus Christ forgave, for to err is human and to forgive is divine.

The church is not omniscient. Awareness of this requires that it asks questions, seeks explanations and clarifications. When things are blurred the church should seek expert advice. The church should not act out of ignorance or become a permanent opposition without reason. The principle could be put this way, “Seek illumination, admit ignorance.”

The church is not the State. It is therefore important for the church to know her limits and respect it. The church should not trespass on the rights of the State or reduce the dignity of its elected officers. Respect is reciprocal. The church should not trespass into provinces that are really not her own.

Prayers! One of the major roles of the church towards the State is praying for the welfare of the State. Governance is challenging and full of temptations because power has the tendency to corrupt. The church should be on her knees praying for the State functionaries that God might help them in their duties with His Grace, Strength and wisdom. Prayer works.

7.2 Role of the State

The State has a number of positive roles in enabling the church efficiently perform its chosen welfare work for the citizens of the State. These include legal support, financial support and security.

Legal support: the State is in position to create helpful legal instruments that can aid the church in its work and remove some obstructions that inhibit the work of the Church. This type of duty creates good relations between Church and State. It makes the State a helpful partner to the church and gives the church a sense of belonging within the State. Such legal backing empowers and challenges the church to be the best it can in the society and to play its role without hindrance or fear.

The State can and ought to offer solid financial support for the work of the church especially for projects undertaken by the Church which are for the welfare of the citizens and therefore for the welfare of the State. This includes the areas of education and healthcare. It is the citizens of the State that are finally being educated and whose health are being looked after in these projects. It is therefore in the interest of the State to even encourage the church to do these by assisting through subsidizing the efforts of the church.

The State has charge of the State security apparatus. This ought to be used judiciously to protect the rights, life and safety of its citizens. It is also to be used to protect certain key institutions such as the church. The danger of abuse of this security is there and the State should refrain from using such powers to muscle the church into submission or to silence the prophetic voice of the church. Uncomfortable as the prophetic voice might appear, it is better that the peace of the cemetery. There is a saying, "a people that kills its rebels has peace but they have lost their future." It is for the sake of a better future that the critic or prophet must be allowed to be and must be listened to.

The State therefore has a duty not to suppress the prophetic voice of the church. The State should cultivate a healthy attitude to criticism. When the chips are down it is the one who criticizes the State that truly loves it.

8. CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, I have not strictly speaking offered any standard solution to the problem of Church and State in Nigeria. What I have done is to create an awareness of the complexity of the theme, using our civil and ecclesiastical history as resource. My paper has endeavored however to float some thoughts, some ingredients that could help us in the process of developing an elastic formula that works for our context. This is an ongoing task. Human beings make things work. We can gradually improve our church and State relations by being involved in the process of patiently laying the foundations, by engaging in honest and open debates, by continually grappling with the issues as they arise and erecting legal instruments as we go along as sign posts for those coming after us. If I have enabled us all to see a little bit more clearly the beacons, the mine-fields, and the rugged nature of the terrain, as well as the beauty of what it will be when a robust relationship exists between church and State, then I would consider my job done. I thank you very much for your kind attention.

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. Aig-Imoukhuede, (ed), *A Handbook of Nigerian Culture*, (revised edition), Ikeja, 1992, p. 27.
2. Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1986, pp. 135 – 157. see especially p. 157. For some people, African Traditional Religion has virtually been snuffed out under the heavy invasion of Christianity especially. For such people, Ejizu's *Down but not out*, which focused on the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, will be a worthwhile read. Cf. Christopher I. Ejizu, *Down But Not Out: Contemporary Forms of Igbo Indigenous Religion*, in T. I. Okere, (ed.), *Religion in a world of Change: African Ancestral Religion, Islam and Christianity*, Owerri, Assumpta Press, 2003, pp. 182 -199.

3. See Chukwudi Anthony Njoku, *Imperial Religions in a Fractured Land: The Structural Roots of Religious Hubris in Nigeria*, in Okere, T. I. (ed.), *Religion in a World of Change: African Ancestral Religion, Islam and Christianity, Owerri, 2002*, pp. 270 – 285.
4. David Baret would see in Nigeria a fulfilment of his Prophecy of the explosion of Christianity both in terms of population and character. In his writings Afe Adogame, has also elaborated the Diaspora capacities of the new Christian denominations, especially those with a strictly African origin. The World Headquarters of a number of these new Christian fellowships is in Nigeria.
5. Cf. Trimingham, J. S., *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa*, London, 1955, p. 9.
6. See for example, T. McGettrick, *Memoirs of Bishop T. McGettrick*, Enugu, 1988, esp. pp. 9 – 45, J. Jordan, *Autobiography of a Missionary*, Dublin, 1992, pp. 1 - 2.
7. Cf. M. N. G. Phadraig, . M. N. G. Phadraig, *Ireland: The Exception that Proves Two Rules*, in T. M. Gannon, (ed.), *World Catholicism in Transition*, New York, 1988, p. 206.
8. Cf. M. N. G. Phadraig, *Ireland: The Exception that Proves Two Rules*, pp. 205 -217, esp. pp. 206 -207. See also S. Farragher, *Dev and His Alma Mater. Eamon de Valera's Lifelong Association with Blackrock College 1898 – 1975*, Dublin & London, 1984, pp. 9 -14.
9. Cf. J. Jordan, *Autobiography of a missionary*, pp. 33 – 34. See also, S. Farragher, *Dev and His Alma Mater*, pp. 127 – 128, T. Kiggins, *Maynooth Mission to Africa. The Story of St. Patrick's Society*, Dublin, 1991, pp. 7 -9 & 13.
10. See for example, I. R. A. Ozigbo, *An Evaluation of Christian Pioneering Techniques with Particular Reference to Nigeria*, in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 8, 1(1994), 43 -62.
11. In carrying out its preferential option for the poor and the oppressed in the society, the church will now and again

make recourse to *argumentum ad misericordia*, 'appeal to pity', especially in realisation of the weak position of its wards and sometimes their own contribution to their unfortunate situation.

SIX

Elections or Selections, Ethnic and Money Politics in Nigeria: Lessons from the Past Towards a Better Tomorrow.

Chief John Nwodo Jnr (Ike Nsukka)

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960 our politics has been characterized by intense ethnic rivalry, unbridled corruption and massive electoral frauds.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Pre Independence Period

When the British colonial rulers, in the early part of the 20th century, forced the two hundred and fifty ethnic groups that make up Nigeria into a territorial entity, their major preoccupation was to maintain law and order and to make the economic exploitation of Nigeria as easy as possible. To do this they applied the principle of "indirect rule" principally in Northern Nigeria. By this rule they consolidated the position of traditional institutions in the emergent political system in Northern Nigeria thus preserving the cultures in the ruling emirates and building, as it were, a country of people with different and divergent cultures and systems of administration. Under Lord Lugard, the Crown colonial administration of Nigeria was in the words of Professor Tekena Tamuno, "a mild autocracy"¹. His Nigerian Council comprised of expatriates and six nominated Nigerians with no legislative functions whatsoever. The British continued from 1914 to tinker with the constitutional framework of Nigeria until 1951 when the McPherson Constitution came into effect. The McPherson Constitution is note worthy for our purposes because it entrenched the introduction of three regional governments each with its own autonomous legislature.

In the words, of Dauda Abubakar, a professor of Political Science and Administration at the University of Maiduguri, the implication of the McPherson Constitution for the political development of Nigeria is threefold.

“First with the regionalization of the legislature, the British colonial state subverted the possibilities of national unity and integration because there was no natural forum where the emergent Nigerian elite could begin to discuss the future of their country”.

“The second implicationlies in the fact that it provided a veritable ground for the ascendancy of ethnicity and regionalism in the political process. The political parties that emerged to contest political power relied primarily on mobilizing primordial sentiments, as opposed to national issues, to capture state power from the colonialists.” “A third implicationis that it entrenched what Dunmoye described as a “skewed federal system” in which the Northern Region exercised dominance over the other two regions because of its geographical size and population.”³

Curiously the growth of political parties in Nigeria was characterized by distinct affiliations of the parties with ethnic based organizations and lack of reasonable support in areas outside the ethnic origin of their founders.

The most national in character of all the political parties was the NCNC, the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens. Its regional based was principally in the East and the Midwest. It however had strong support amongst Igbos, Edos and Yorubas. NCNC was founded in 1944 by Sir, Herbert Macaulay and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. It is note-worthy that when Zik succeeded Macaulay as President, he served contemporaneously as President of Igbo State Union and President of the NCNC in 1948. He subsequently resigned as President of Igbo State Union.

In 1945 Chief Obafemi Awolowo and other Yorubas in London formed the Edge Omo Oduduwa. In 1948 they launched it in Nigeria with Adeyemo Alahija as its president. In 1951 Awolowo

formed the Action Group Party as the political wing of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa. Alakija in his speech at the launching of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa remarked that the Egbe was founded to protect the future of the Yoruba from being relegated to the background. J.S Coleman in his *Background to Nationalism* remarked, “from July to September, 1948 Yoruba – Ibo animosity bordered on the verge of violence. At the height of the tension, radicals on both sides descended upon local market and bought up all available matchets”⁴

Nnoli in his “Ethnic Politics in Nigeria” lambasted Chief Awolowo in these words, “the Action Group became the first party of the Nigerian Petty bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie to be inspired by, founded on and nourished by ethnic chauvinism and regional parochialism. For the first time, a nationalist group, desirous of wresting the reign of National Government from the Colonialists, explicitly associated itself with the destiny, of one ethnic group in the country, considering itself as merely the political wing of the ethnic groups cultural association”⁵ In the same 1951 the Northern Peoples Congress which emerged from a Northern based cultural group known as Jamiyya' Muta nen Arewa was formed. Its dominant principle was one North, one People. As its nomenclature indicates it was primarily focused on insulating the Northerns from Southern domination, protection of feudalism and defence of the Islamic faith.

The United Independence party of mainly Ibibios and Efiks of South Southern Nigeria was founded by Sir Udoma and Chief Eyo Ita in 1952 as a reaction to the disgraceful expulsion of Eyo Ita from the NCNC and subsequent vacation of his seat as Premier of Eastern Nigeria. In 1952 Mallam Aminu Kano formed a radical political organization called the Northern Elements Progressive Union, NEPU. The party's ideology was the emancipation of the masses (Takakawa) from the stranglehold and exploitative control of the emirate system. It attracted membership from Kano and northern minority ethnic groups like the Igbirras, Bioms, Yoruba and Nupes. In 1953 the Middle Belt Peoples Party was formed,

which in 1955 merged with the Middle Zone league to form the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). UMBC championed interests of the Middle Belt region and drew its support mainly from Birom, Tiv, Nupe and Idoma areas.

In the 1954 elections the NPC Captured 80 Seats in the North, leaving other parties with a few seats each. For instance, the Middle Zone captured three Seats, Idoma State Union, two, the AG, NCNC, Igbirra Tribal Union, Birom Progressive Union, Middle Belt Peoples Party, and an independent candidate get one seat each.

The table below shows the distribution of seats won by the Parties in the 1956 Elections.

Region	AG	NCNC	NPC	Others	Total
East	18	64	0	2	84
North	4	9	106	12	131
West	48	32	0	0	80
Total	70	95	106	14	295

A similar pattern of voters' behaviour was also exhibited in the 1959 elections.

One notable event which affected the dream of a united Nigeria during the period under review was the story of carpet-crossing in Ibadan legislative House, a maneuver employed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo using primordial ethnic sentiments to deprive Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe the leadership of the Western House of Assembly and the Premiership of that region.

Chinua Achebe narrates it this way, "As a student in Ibadan, I was an eyewitness to that momentous occasion when Chief Obafemi Awolowo "stole" the leadership of Western Nigeria from Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in broad daylight on the floor of the Western House of Assembly and sent the great Zik scampering back to the Niger from whence he camesomeday when we shall have outgrown tribal politics, or when our children shall have done so,

sober historians of Nigerian nation will see that event as the abortion of a pan-Nigerian vision which, however ineptly, the NCNC tried to have and to hold. No matter how anyone attempts to explain away that event, in retrospect, it was the death of a dream – Nigeria in which a citizen could live and work in a place of his choice anywhere, and pursue any legitimate goal open to his fellows; a Nigeria in which an Easterner might aspire to be Premier in the west and a Northerner becomes Mayor of Enugu. That dream – Nigeria suffered a death – blow from Awolowo's “success” in the Western House of Assembly”⁶

Udoji in his review of this period of Nigerian political history holds that the inability of Nigerian politicians to mobilize the country under one banner in the struggle for Independence bred disunity. In his words, “Zik laboured to achieve this under the NCNC but his efforts were torpedoed by the Action Group in the West and the Northern Peoples Congress in the North. The result was that in the fight for independence, Nigeria had neither a Nehru nor an Nkrumah nor a Nyerere. Because the leaders were pulling in different directions, it was impossible to develop a national consensus, loyalty and identity. Whatever loyalty there was, was to the Region and not to the Nation. The Slogan “one North, one People” was shouted all over the North in the 50s and 60s and no one seemed to see its inherent potential danger.

Even though the rise of ethnic politics has been attributed largely to particular individuals and political parties, Professor Okwudiba Nnoli holds that socio-economic conditions in colonial urban centres in pre-independent Nigeria contributed immensely to disunity in Nigeria. In the case of Lagos, the Yoruba, who were well entrenched in the professions and the bureaucracy because of a head start in acquiring western education, soon felt threatened by the influx of the Igbo.

Politics of the First Republic 1960 – 1964

The 1959 elections as we said earlier produced similar results as the 1956 election. It had the NPC taking 142, NCNC 89 and AG 73 seats in the Federal Legislature. Each of the parties controlled effectively the North, East and West respectively. Though the NCNC emerged as the one party with the largest number of seats in regions other than its leader's, it had lost much of its national outlook. Since none of the parties won a clear majority in the National Legislature a coalition became imperative. The 1951 betrayal of Azikiwe by Chief Awolowo was still lurking in the minds of the NCNC leaders. The ubiquitous Igbo merchant lobbied their leadership for an alliance which did not constrict their areas of operation. In the circumstance the NPC /NCNC Coalition was born.

Two years into Independence a major split occurred in the Action Group. The Action Group then in opposition at the centre chose to have its leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo as leader of opposition in the Federal House, and Chief S. L. Akintola as Premier of Western Nigeria. These two gentlemen developed a personal rift. Whereas Chief Akintola favoured an alliance with the NPC, Chief Awolowo preferred an expansion of the Action Group to the extent that it would need no coalition to control the next Federal government. One thing led to the other culminating in the expulsion of Chief Akintola's men from key party posts in the February 1960 convention of the Action Group. Following this development the National Executive of Action Group by an overwhelming majority demanded the resignation of Akintola as Premier of Western Nigeria. Akintola refused to resign and instead demanded a dissolution of the House and fresh elections. In the words of Ola Balogun, "this request was turned down and a handful of his supporters prevented the House from meeting by creating an uproar and flinging chairs around, whereupon the Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the West and

replaced the Action Group government by a temporary administration appointed by itself"⁸

The Federal Government in addition set up an Enquiry to investigate mismanagement of public funds by the Action Group, and Chief Awolowo and other leading members of the Action Group were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the Federal Government. They were subsequently sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Akintola formed a new party the NNDP.

Taking advantage of this misfortune that fell on the Action Group the NCNC/NPC Coalition which then controlled the Federal government joined hands to pave the way for the non-Yoruba minorities of the Western Region to have a region of their own-the Mid-west Region in 1963. Many political commentators hold that the high handedness of the Federal Government, its open hostility towards the Action Group and its patronage of Akintola's disloyalty to his party and lack of popular support laid the foundations for executive recklessness and abuse of power in Nigerian politics.

A second crisis that occurred during this period was the National Census Crisis. The census "battle" as Ola Balogun called it had become a crucial element in the struggle for power in the Federation. The result provided evidence of considerable rigging and manipulation in the counting giving some parts of the country surprising increase of 200 per cent in population over a single decade. The figures gave the North 29, 777.986, The East, 12 388,646 and the west (including the Midwest) 12,811,837. On the basis of these figures the Federal Electoral Commission allocated 312 seats in the Federal House of Representative with 167 for the North, 70 for the East, 71 for the west and Midwest and 4 for Lagos. More seats were allocated to the Northern Region in the new legislature than to all the other regions combined confirming

effectively the Northern domination of Nigerian politics. According to Dr. Ralph Chiemeka Nwokedi in *His Power Sharing in Nigeria Federation*, the census fiasco, had convinced the Igbo-dominated NCNC leadership that their alliance with the Hausa-dominated NPC at the centre was no longer tenable. Angered by Akintola's support of the revised 1964 census result, the NCNC leader, Dr. M.I. Okpara influenced the NCNC members in the Akintola's Western Regional government to quit the regional coalition. The NCNC thereafter entered into alliance with the Yoruba-dominated Action Group and formed the United Progressive Grand Alliance, which embraced all the Northern minority and opposition parties. As a counter measure, the Nigeria National Alliance was spearheaded by the NPC and included Akintola's break away faction of Action Group, now known as National Democratic Party (NNDP), plus several other small southern parties opposed to the NCNC.¹⁰

The country was at once polarized into North and South in an epic 'battle' for the control of the Federal Government. In the face of real and imagined electoral malpractices, UPGA announced a boycott of the elections. The boycott was only effective in the East and some parts of the Midwest. UPGA filed law suits challenging the validity of the election and began to mount pressure on the President of the Republic not to name a Prime Minister. NNA on its part insisted that having won majority of the seats in the House of Representatives, the boycott was ineffectual. In the very embarrassing circumstance, Dr. Azikiwe, as President of the Federation reappointed Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister and persuaded him to form a broad-based National Government that will include his political adversaries.

The victory of the NNDP in Western Nigeria owing mainly to manipulation of the electoral machinery by the Akintola Government and the falling prices of cocoa led to chaos and insecurity in the west. Houses and cars belonging to political

opponents were burnt down. Petrol was thrown on political opponents who were set ablaze in broad day light. One prominent Action Grouper, Rev. J.A. Akinyemi was set upon by things in July sustaining severe matchet wounds, while an NNDP leader Rev. J.A. Odufunnade was beaten to death in August. By the end of 1965 this crisis in the west had spread to Lagos. Nigeria was mired in serious crisis. The violence widened daily.

It was in this atmosphere of chaos, insecurity and threatening collapse of the institutions of government in the Federation that a group of young officers in the Nigerian Army seized power in January 1966.

Government after January 1966

The government of Nigeria after January 1966 can been characterized into three main phases namely:

- (I) The predominance of military rule between 1966 – 1979, and 1983 – 1999
- (ii) The short period of democratic government between 1979- 1983
- (iii) The return to full democratic governance between 1999- 2007

Some historians have dubbed the army takeover of January 1966, an Igbo led coup d'etat with the purpose of achieving Igbo domination. Their justification is based on the disproportionate number of Igbo leaders, including politicians and soldiers killed during that coup as well as the high number of Ibos involved in its planning. Others contend that given the high number of Igbo officers in the army at that time their high number was a natural consequence. Be that as it may, the containment of the coup plotters and the subsequent takeover of General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo did not assuage the anti-Igbo feelings. Consequently, Ironsi was killed in July 1966 in obvious response to his unitary government policy –

a policy his murderers subsequently adopted and perfected. What we can safely conclude for our purposes is that the pre 1966 politics of Nigeria pervaded the armed forces of Nigeria. Their takeover of power even if in theory suspended political activities, their governance continued to propagate the political differences that precipitated their advent into governance for this reason and for the entrenched division in our polity, military rule in 1967 led Nigeria into a three years civil war. At the end of the war in 1970 the army set a time table for return of the country to civil rule in 1976. This programme was aborted leading to another military coup led by General Muritala Mohammed. After the containment of Nzeogwu's coup, and the counter coup of then Lt Col Yakubu Gowon, the Northern Military elite continued to rule Nigeria, only interrupted briefly by the assassination of General Mohammed by Northern Middle Belt officers and the 'stepping aside' of General Babangida.

General Mohammed and General Obasanjo had a programme for return to civil rule which led to the emergence of President Shehu Shagari in 1979.

President Shagari's government was toppled in December 1983 by General Buhari heralding another sixteen years of Military rule with four different Heads of State. During these sixteen years three attempts were made to return Nigeria to civil rule namely, the Babangida transition programme between 1989 – 1993, the Abacha programme of 1998 and the Abdulsalami Abubakar programme of 1999.

We shall examine in the following order the character of Nigerian politics during these military transition efforts.

- 1) The Shagari era of 1979 – 1983
- 2) The Babangida Transition Programme
- 3) The Abacha return to Civil Rule Programme
- 4) Abdulsalami Abubakars democratization programme.

The Shagari Era of 1979 – 1983

The Federal Electoral Commission under the Muritala/Obasanjo administration recognized six political parties namely the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), The Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), The Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), The Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) and the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP). The character and dramatis personae of the pre and post independence politics of Nigeria resurrected. Most former members of the NPC were in the NPN. Chief Awolowo led the UPN displaying a membership akin to the Action Group's, Dr. Azikiwe led the NPP exercising total control in Igbo areas previously controlled by this NCNC. NEPU reappeared in Kano under PRP holding complete sway. The GNPP represented North Eastern fringes opposed to Sokoto inspired domination of Northern politics.

In the Presidential elections the following pattern emerged.

NPP won 82.83% of the votes in Anambra and 86.69% of the votes in Imo. These were the only two Igbo States.

UPN won 92% of the votes in Ogun State, 94.5% in Ondo, 85.78% in Oyo, 82.3% in Lagos and 53.2% in Bendel.

NPN won 72.65% of the votes in Rivers State, 72% in Niger, 76% in Benue, 62.45% in Bauchi, 64.40% in Cross River, 53.62% in Kwara, 43.12% in Kaduna 36% in Bendel, 35.5% in Gongola and 34.7% in Plateau.

While the NPP and the UPN maintained the ethnic support of their progenitors the NCNC and the Action Group, the NPN made outstanding inwards into the Northern and Southern minority areas of Nigeria whilst maintaining some serious presence in some Northern States like Sokoto, Niger and Bauchi. Soon into the period of this democratic era the other five parties formed an alliance called the PPA with the sole purpose of containing and overthrowing the NPN. The NPN survived with a fragile alliance

with the NPP and ingenious subterfuge in GNPP, PRP and NPP leading to the splitting of these parties into factions with parts of them working with the NPN, Lary Diamond in his perceptive analysis of political cleavages that contributed to the collapse of the second republic, identified four areas which polarized the political parties, thereby exacerbating fractional conflicts, violence and instability. The areas include: revenue allocation, intra-party disputes especially the PRP split, the impeachment of Balarale Musa as the governor of Kaduna State and the Kano Riot of 1981.¹¹

The Babangida Transition Programme

When Babangida took over from the Buhari/Idiagbom Junta in 1985, he announced an elaborate transition program with a terminal date of 1990. That terminal date was postponed twice until a final date of August 1993 was chosen. Babangida's Electoral Commission finally organized a Presidential election on June 12th 1993. That election was won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola in what has been variously described as the freest and fairest elections in Nigeria. In the final result announced by the National Electoral Commission Abiola had a 56 percent victory – capturing the South Western Yoruba ethnic heartland, the Northern and middle belt states. In spite of this, the Babangida administration annulled the elections claiming that the voting had been irreparably tarnished by procedural irregularities and a legal tussle, and that it acted to protect the integrity of the nation's judiciary. According to Dauda Abubakar, "the annulment ultimately unleashed the "hidden agenda," that the Northern Oligarchy would not want to relinquish political power to other sections of the country. In South Western states, Babangida's action was greeted with civil resistance. Violence erupted in cities such as Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta leading to the destruction of life and property. As the political crisis intensified.... Northerners moved from Southern cities up North, the Igbo and Yoruba left their business in the Northern cities and moved to their "ethnic home bases"¹²

In the words of Claude Ake, “the communal instability that followed the annulment not only raised the North – South dichotomy of the National Question, but it also revealed the fragility of Nigeria and its lack of autonomy to mediate political conflict.”¹³ General Babangida stepped aside in the wake of the annulment of June 12, 1993 following local disquiet especially in the armed forces. Thereafter a three months spell of the Interim National Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan was abruptly brought to an end by General Sani Abacha.

The Abacha Return to Civil Rule Programme

Perhaps the only useful contribution of the Abacha programme was the setting up of a National Constitutional Conference which for the first time gave legal expression to the constitution of Nigeria into six geopolitical Zones for the purposes of participation in our National Leadership and Allocation of our National Resources.

Other than this, the process of substituting selection for election of public officers into the executive and legislative arms of Government blossomed under Abacha. A former Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the late Chief Bola Ige, described the five political parties under General Abacha's rule as “five leprous fingers” The parties were run from the presidency, candidates were qualified or disqualified according to the whims and caprices of the military leadership then. A disgraceful caricature of democracy was displayed. Luckily Providence relieved Nigeria of this mess with the demise of Abacha in June 1998. Thereafter General Abdulsalami Abubakar assumed office as Head of State.

Abdulsalami Abubakar's Democratisation Programme

General Abdulsamami Abubakar had not until the death of General Abubakar held any political office throughout the long period of military rule in Nigeria. He was a soldier's soldier, totally devoid of army political ambitions. He was deeply worried about the declining credibility of the military in Nigeria and the loss of our

nation's international respectability. Accordingly he vowed to return the country to civil rule in the shortest possible time. Between July 1988 and May 29th 1999 he did just that – a record nine months of transition!! Owing to this short period and the haste of activities to meet a dateline there were some imperfections especially with the finalization of the constitution and the control of some electoral irregularities here and there. In the main however, Nigeria returned to civil rule on May 29th 1999 with General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Military ruler, (now civilian) and a Southerner as its President.

The Obasanjo Era

In nearly eight years of democratic governance Obasanjo has turned democracy upside down. In 2003 he organized the worst election in the history of Nigeria. Describing the elections in his, “This Madness Called Election, 2003,” Rev. Fr. John Odey had this to say, “By the most outrageous and wrongful use of our security and law enforcement agents and other dreadful forms of organized thuggery, not through benign persuasion, President Obasanjo and his supporters declared a war against the people of Nigeria in the name of political elections and conquered. In this way, they have succeeded in winning political slaves, not political converts. The elections were not transparent that is why the nation has been sitting on a tinderbox of precipitous resentment”¹⁴.

As we approach the eve of another election in April our country is devastated by the lack of transparency in the build up to the elections. The Independent Electoral Commission has been used discriminately to disqualify a number of candidates from contesting elections contrary to Sec. 32 (5) of the Electoral Act which gives the court the powers to do so. The government on its part has used the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and a quickly contrived Administrative Panel to indict selected politicians and make them ineligible to contest Elections under

section 137 and 182 of the 1999 Constitution.

There is a deluge of cases before our courts calling for legal redress of various forms of miscarriages of Justice. The Independent Electoral Commission openly avows that it is not bound by court decisions. In a smart move to ridicule the maneuvers of the Federal government, the Abia State government appointed similar Administrative Panels that indicted leading PDP candidates and published a white paper to make the indictment appear to confirm with the constitution. The INEC disregards this indictment whilst accepting the Federal indictment. Prominent Nigerians are speaking up about our slide to anarchy. Amongst them are Prof. Wole Soyinka, Chief Gani Fawelimi SAN, and lately His Highness the Sultan of Sokoto who has frontally accused the INEC of being unprepared for the elections.

Many of the parties in total disregard of their rules pick and choose candidates at will without going through the parties primaries. In some cases where primaries have been successfully concluded and a winner emerged, like Ararume of PDP, in Imo State gubernatorial primaries, the party changed the candidate. After tedious court cases the Court of Appeal has now ordered the PDP to reinstate Ararume as its candidate. The Nation waits to see the fate of the rule of law and Ararume in this saga. While all this is going on the Niger Delta situation continues to escalate with no hope of justice or de-escalation in sight.

More worrisome is whether the April elections will hold at all. Apart from the logistics problems of reprinting ballot papers to include previously disqualified candidates restored by the courts, there are two major incurable illegalities that the nation has to contend with. Firstly, until now no final voters list has been published and we are 23 days away to the first set of elections. Sec 21 of the Electoral Act 2006 requires INEC to publish the final

voters register after all the objections have been corrected, not later than 60 days to the elections. Secondly, S 32 (2) of the Electoral Act requires INEC to publish personal particulars of candidates within days of its receipt of them. The lack of publication of these particulars has led the Federal Board of Internal Revenue (FIRS) to go to court against INEC in order to verify the authenticity of tax clearance certificates submitted by various candidates. Perhaps this state of affairs led the Federal Attorney General to alert the Nation that the time frame for the elections is too short!!

Writing in an editorial on Thursday, March 8th 2007, the *Vanguard* Newspaper holds that, "Chief Ojo's latest interjection provides further evidence that the immediate intervention of the National Assembly is required to clear all convoluted obstacles to the election without resort to the partisanship that trails INEC's translucent decisions".

Even the simple assignment of voter education that precedes an election has been completely neglected. Until now no sample ballot paper has been made available to the political parties to educate the voters so that mistakes resulting in wrongful identification of party symbols by illiterates can be eliminated.

Politicians aware of these limitations and the dangers they pose to free and fair elections are lukewarm in their campaigns, limiting themselves to symbolic appearances in state capitals and a few local government areas. This leaves the voter not only wondering about what kind of election this is but who to vote for and why.

The obvious lesson to learn from all this is that the kind of leadership that Nigeria is yearning for has continued to elude us. Because it has eluded us, the average Nigerian has lost confidence in governance and has become as a result unpatriotic. That is why a policeman will not bat an eyelid to take money openly at check points from motorists. That is why judges are being dismissed for compromising their oath of office. That is why we hear of large sums of money stashed away by politicians and public officers

including a former Inspector General of Police whose duty is to prevent this kind of practices. That is why our students are in secret cults. That is why our lecturers give marks for money.

I had always advocated for a more confederal approach to our constitutional structure in order to lower the ubiquitous nature of our Federal Government and lessen ethnic tensions by giving the component areas more autonomy over their resources and their management but it is my honest view that whatever system of governance is adopted for Nigeria, we need to be more patriotic in our search for leadership. All too often the yardstick is ethnic origin and capacity to finance the elections. Abiola's example has shown that financial prowess is not a guarantee to success in Nigeria election.

It is my sincere hope that all the prayers that Nigerians have continued to power to Almighty God will occasion a new leadership in our country that will restore hope to our hopeless. I thank you for your kind attention.

ENDNOTES

1. T.N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of The Nigerian State: The Southern Phase 1898-1914*, Longman 1972, Ch 4.
2. R.A. Dunmoye, "Critical Analysis of Party Systems and Ethnics in Nigeria" in IES Amdi and W Hinjari(eds) *Party Systems, Democracy And Political Stability in Nigeria* (NPSA. 1990)
3. Dauda Abubakar, *The Rise and Fall of The First and Second Republics of Nigeria: New Strategies for curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*. Ch 3 p. 74
4. Coleman J.S, *Nigeria: Background To Nationalism* Berkeley: University of California Press. (1963)
5. Nnoli O. (1978), *Etani Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu Fourth Dimension Publishers 155
6. Achebe Chinua, *Failure of Leadership – The Trouble with*

Nigeria CL.5.

7. Udoji Jerome, Under Three Master P 158
8. Nnoli O. (Supra)
9. Ola Balogun - The Tragic Years, Nigeria In Crisis 1966-1970 P. 17
10. Nwokedi R.C. Power Sharing in Nigerian Federation p. 51-52.
11. Diamond Larry - Cleavage, Conflict and Anxiety In the Second Nigerian Republic Journal of Modern African Studies 20 4 (1982), 609-668.
12. Dauda Abubaka (Supra), 91-92
13. Claude Ake "The Nigerian State: Antimonies of a Periphery Formation," The Political Economy of Nigeria (London Longman 1985)
14. John Odey, This Madness Called Election 2003.

SEVEN

Art, Media and Literature as Catalysts of Socio Political Change: The Nigerian Experience and The Role of the Church

By Dr. Bridget O. N. Nwanze.

INTRODUCTION

The topic I present today examines the importance of the different facets of art and their roles as catalysts of socio political change. One does not have to peer through crystal balls or satellite lenses to realize that neither we humans, nor the products of our imagination exist in isolation from the world around us. Our expressions only mirror our experiences and so, to understand one's condition is to relate oneself to the surrounding community.

Different art forms exist in Nigeria today and although art is entertaining and pleasurable, it is not unthreatening. Art has gradually evolved from its relegated and traditional approach to the role of instilling pride, helping people think critically and visualize alternatives. It is now used to communicate and has the ability to produce tangible outcomes.

In the past eight years, Nigeria has experienced socio political and economic changes associated with the re-birth of democracy in the land. Attempts may have been made to strengthen the economy and positively reform the highly celebrated debt pardon, sanitize the banking industry, implement new education policies and reposition the telecommunications and the information technology sectors.

However, and unfortunately so, the plight of the common man has seen little or no improvement in this time. 'There has actually been a divergence rather than convergence of regional disparities and inequalities' [Aka 2000]. Poverty and unemployment still

abound among most of the country's population leading invariably to high rates of crime and moral decadence. The rural areas contend with a plethora of health and environmental problems, collapse of essential services like NEPA and NITEL, resulting into low life expectancy among its inhabitants. With the exception of those in power or close to the seat of power, the past few years have been very traumatic. Feelings of frustration and disillusionment or dissatisfaction, as the case may be are expressed as a way of coping with the existing situation, encouraging the government to do more, or chastising them for not doing enough.

Faced with these situations, the average Nigerian unconsciously engages in reformation exercise through which complex problems that have been posed on our society over the years are exposed. Some of such areas of focus include the visual art, literature, music, drama, media etc. as these influence the social and political perceptions of the citizenry. The question that rightly comes to mind is how these forms of expressions can gradually and positively influence the riddled mood of the polity.

Please sit back and let us explore together through these sources that shed light on our Christian artistic point of view towards the Nation's socio political reforms.

What is Art?

Usually, Art is viewed upon by the lay man as drawing painting and sculpture. Art however, is much more than that. Art is the visual culture that uses materials to convey ideas. It is a way of life and indeed, the best and most efficient way of doing anything.

Art is all encompassing and may refer to any field ranging from Graphics, Textile, Painting, Sculpture, visual communication, publication, broadcasting, poetry, literature and music to play acting and architecture. It educates the society and to a large extent, responds to the direct concern and corrective reflection of the situation of the country which we live in. It is used as a means

for conveying messages from deep within the minds to the populace.

Corroborating this, Kandinsky believes that 'Every work of art is the child of its time; often it is the mother of our emotions' '.... work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artist; this emotion has the capacity to evoke a similar emotion in the observer' [Kandinsky 1913, 4]. and of course the outer which is the visual absorption and cognitive challenges.

Art sensitizes, inspires, uplifts, transforms and awakens the conscience be it through science, engineering, dance, social work, writing, singing or any act of creating. It is a starting point for dialogue.

Art according to Schumann has the obligation' to send light into the darkness of men's hearts'. It is therefore necessary to develop and properly harness Art skills.

Art and the Public

'Art-in-the-public-interest,' a term coined by the critic Arlene Raven, is defined as "...activist and communitarian in spirit; its modes of expression encompass a variety of traditional media, including painting and sculpture, as well as nontraditional media—"street art, video, page art, billboards, protest actions and demonstrations, oral histories, dances, environments, posters and murals." Raven, in her description of the form, states that it "forges direct intersections with social justice issues, encourages community coalition-building in pursuit of social justice and attempts to garner greater institutional empowerment for artists to act as social agents. Artists engaged in such art aspire to reveal the plight and plead the case of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged and to embody what they view as humanitarian values."

Because of the inherent power behind their activities artists who criticize the system are censored through invisibility. On the other hand, artists who receive state or corporate funding, status, fame and wealth, generally support the status quo. Elizam Escobar, a Puerto Rican painter and former political prisoner, considers the visionary role of the artist in his essay, "Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom." Escobar writes that "if art is to become a force for social change, it must take its strength from the politics of art, art's own way of affecting both the world and the political-direct. But the politics of art will only happen if the power of the imagination is able to create a symbolic relationship between those who participate, the artwork and the concrete world, always understanding the work of art's sovereignty (or relative autonomy) in relation to concrete reality." This approach calls on artists to prioritize their imagination in order to create a revolutionary dialogue or exchange; one that is absent of didacticism and that which does not pretend to offer solutions, but instead provoke dialogue. Escobar challenges artists to liberate themselves from the "culture of fear, and the inferiority/superiority complex we have in our dealings at the political-direct level."

Power of Visuals

It is a proven fact that the mind has a photographic capacity. The sense of sight is a powerful one and this strength has been played upon by people wishing to make a statement through art forms that rely on the sense of sight.

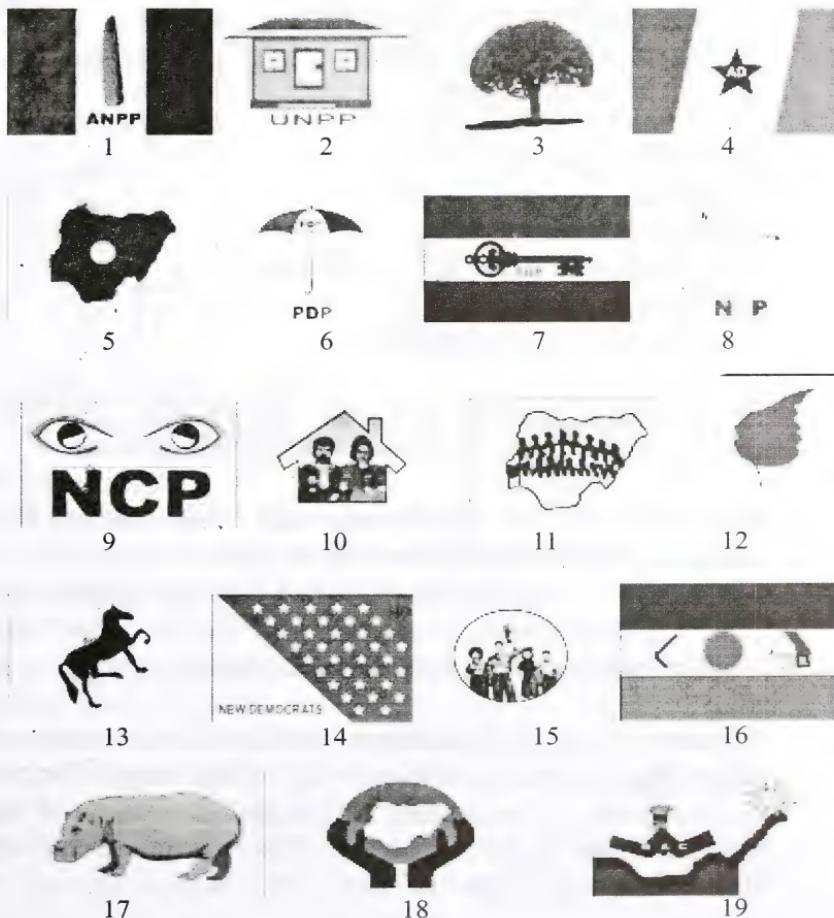
Visual information creates awareness when artists shape ideas through, imagination and intellect. It also helps to articulate experiences, struggles and aspirations.

Apart from language, the most common way of identifying people, organizations, institutions and societies are through signs and symbols. These can be in form of colors and forms. On the Political scene, political parties have party symbols and candidate's pictures on their banners, posters, T shirts and

billboards, for quick and efficient identification with their individual purposes and causes.

The sight of the umbrella of the PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) logo for instance, reminds the viewer that the PDP is a large, embracing and all encompassing party while the brooms of the AC (Action Congress) readily remind the voting public that the party is ready to sweep away corruption and old vices.

In similar ways the various parties have their unique identities as is the case in the logos.



Some Nigerian Political Party Logos

Key to Party Logos

1. All Nigerian Peoples Party
2. United Nigerian Peoples Party
3. Progressive Action Congress
4. Alliance for Democracy
5. Movement for Democratic Justice
6. Peoples Democratic Party
7. Peoples Redemption Party
8. National Democratic Party
9. National Conscience Party
10. Better Nigerian Progressive Party
11. Community Party of Nigeria
12. Green Party of Nigeria
13. Justice Party
14. New Democrats
15. Peoples Mandate Party
16. United Democratic Party
17. Liberal Democratic Party of Nigeria
18. Nigerian Advance Party
19. National Action committee

These mental pictures stay with the viewers, long after the speeches made by the candidates have been forgotten.

Words are few that express the role of art better. For Bret Rothstein, 'Sight could put one on the mind's road to God. It also could serve as a primary means for conveying notions of political order, regional identity, social status, and the like.' [Bret Rothstein] Politics must go side by side with sound mind and body.

Cartoons are another substantial medium of commentary which relay ideas and subtly bring about social change. They present serious issues in a manner which though funny and socially acceptable, leave messages in the minds of the public that linger on and influence opinions.

**NO WORD ON OIL
SUBSIDY?**



**Silence is the best
answer for a fool**

**CO-OPERATE WITH
POLICE: I.G TELLS
STUDENTS**



**...and let the sleeping
dogs lie**

Art of Literature

This entails the writing of drama, poetry and prose by which artists entertain and enlighten their audience. In Nigeria today, it also involves creative writing, commentaries and jokes.

In Nigeria, most of the plays written exhibit reactions to societal happenings which often are metaphoric reflections of the situation around us. The focus here is the intertwined value of the art forms which is recognized for upliftment, inspiration, transformation, awakening and enlightenment.

The home videos come to play here. A survey of the most popular themes has shown that most of them reflect the expectations and

disappointments of the citizenry in the system. Themes with moral dilemmas facing the nation such as AIDS, corruption and woman's right are usually put across. They serve as the voice of the ordinary man who would otherwise never be heard or given a voice and give a picture of the life of the average Nigerian to the national and international world.



Creative writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Zulu Sofola and Tess Akeke in their works enlighten people on certain erroneous views and superstition. Through stories, metaphors, songs, satires and dances, people actions in their day to day life are mirrored back to them, and the negative and positive consequences are highlighted. Most plays can therefore be said to be mirrors which can creditably correct. In our present day, such artistic ideas have been created and used to educate, entertain and convey motions of political order, both good and bad.

Music

Music is functional and contextual. The absence of music in daily life is unthinkable because it accompanies Nigerians from life to death. Music is used for praise singing at political functions and rallies, at occasions of child dedication, marriages, and funerals. Music plays important roles in the political and social lives of

Nigerians. Reflections of feelings and aspirations are expressed through songs and dances and impressions are made upon the minds of others through the lyrics of the said songs.

It is a Catholic opinion that music is food for the soul – indeed even Shakespeare affirmed this. The primary purpose being to win souls through gospel messages, songs are often accompanied by musical instruments. With inspiration and faith in God, gospel music gives message of hope for many who are void of peace.

As politicians tour from one state to the other to meet the people, church tunes have been adopted as jingles. This is in view of the belief that the accepted norm is that a Christian will always give better governance.

Roberts (1973:171) sees music as' that addressed to the people as an expression of personal testimony'. He also sees the purpose as that which directs the mind inward to one's own experience and needs'.

In contemporary Nigeria, both gospel and circular music are played daily on the radio, and the television, and reach out to such places as homes, social gatherings, prisons, markets and offices. Most artistes make great attempt to correct the ills of the society through music. The late Fela Anikulapo Kuti is a good example. Fela was and is many things to many people. He was known as 'Abami Eda'-'Chief priest' and 'Black president'. He was talented, frank but controversial. He spoke out about violence, theft, disorganization, hypocrisy and corruption. Amazingly, up till this century, he was the most vocal and influential musician Nigeria ever produced. He sang mainly in Yoruba and Pidgin English, yet he was popular all over the country and indeed around the world.

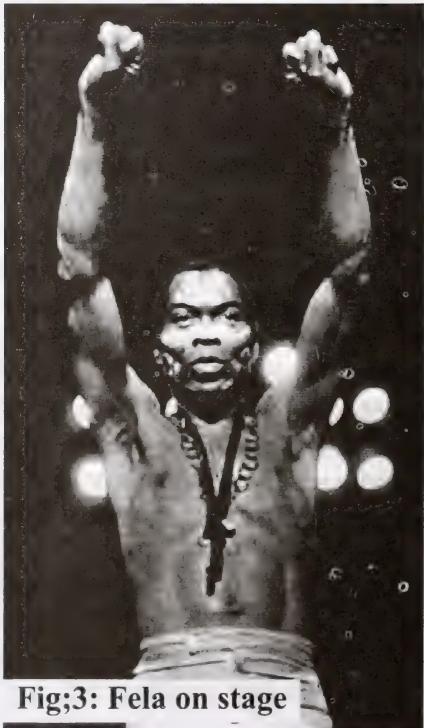


Fig. 2: Fela Anikulapo Ransome Kuti

Fela used his music to channel his peoples' need to the Government. His was a commentary of the times. Some of his inspiring works include-

- 'Original Suffer head'
- 'Suffering and smiling'
- 'Gentleman'
- 'Jeun ko ku' [Chop and quench]
- 'Zombie'
- 'Lady'
- 'Unknown soldier'
- 'Overtake don overtake overtake'
- 'Mr. follow follow'
- 'Army arrangement,' etc.
- 'I.T.T. International thief thief'

This last title generated a lot of stories by the common man who felt that their National cake was shared by a few.



Fig;3: Fela on stage

"Rumors used to be rife that Obj. And MKO are ITT (International Thief Thief) consequent on their perceived roles in the telecommunication saga of that acronym. And that OFN, which was supposed to be, Operation Feed the Nation and the funds mapped thereto later metamorphosed into Obasanjo Farms Nigeria." [Ogbunwezeh 2004]

His music was appealing because of the truth that accompanied it. As a political and cultural critic, he was criticized and victimized but this did not erase the impressions he had created and left on the minds of people the world over who listened to his music and realized the high handedness of the over bearing military regimes in power at the time. Most of his lyrics are today even more relevant than when they were produced. He was indeed a musical icon and his freedom of speech and social criticism as fused in his music has served as catalyst for socio political emancipation in Nigeria. In this political era, it is obvious that there are still artists who make attempt to encourage change through freedom of expression.



**Fig. 5 : African China
Chinagorom Onuoha**



Fig. 4 : Majek Fasek
Recent Performance at SOBs Nightclub, New York
Photo by Bill

Majek Fasek, Eedris Abdulkarim and African China are some that touched the emotions of the Nigerian citizenry. The songs; 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga Everything scatter

scatter, Poor man dey suffer suffer', by Eeddis Abdulkarim and 'Mr. President lead us well, If you teach, teach us well If u be governor govern us well If you be senator senate am well, If you be police police well well no dey take bribe' by African China, were widely accepted by the listening public and hailed as expressing the sentiments of the generality of Nigerians.

In agreement with the themes and in appreciation of the boldness of the artist who seemed to be speaking the peoples mind, Nigerians memorized and sang each of these songs after their release. The radio stations also played them continually. The propriety of grammatical correctness of these songs is not the issue here, rather what is to be brought to light is the strength of the impact of music on the populace. For most Nigerians, music is a therapy.

Among the long list of great artistes is late Chief Osita Osadebe - master of Ibo guitar highlife.

Although he referred to himself as 'The consistent highlife king', his fans named him the 'The doctor of hypertension'. This is as a result of the therapeutic effect of his highlife message. He can not be left unremembered for the ways he expressed his thoughts on the social and cultural challenges of his era in his composition, 'uwa ebuka', 'Yoba Chukwu', 'Ana masi ife uwa', 'Onu uwa', 'Gwam okwu' and above all 'Osundi owendi'.

What about our own Rev Fr. Mbaka who doubles as gospel singer and preacher.



Print Media

In the continuous search for peace and hope, the media has been identified as a catalyst for change. The media has sacrosanct roles in informing, educating and advocating for the progress of the society. The media inspires, entertains and engages the public in political and environmental awareness and actions.

The Nigerian media has continued in its attempt to change the deplorable condition of the Nation, to encourage good governance and to speak with openness and equal attention. Organizations like the Media rights agenda (MRA), The Media Practitioners for Good Governance Project, (MPGGP) have continuously publicized and advocated the enormous role of the media in ensuring credible elections in April 2007. Individuals like The Late Aig Imokhuede of Vanguard, Godwin Agbroko of This Day and Reuben Abati of the Guardian are examples amongst many journalists who have as matter of duty, continued to enlighten the masses on current issues, disseminate information and maintain a wide range of opinions by debating, discussing and negotiating extensively. Sometimes, this expression in advocacy has cost them their lives as in the case of Godwin Agbroko who was felled by assassins, allegedly, due to his numerous honest but scathing commentaries on the failures of the government. A photo journalist, Chima Ubani was also killed in a car crash during a labor rally last year. He also fought tirelessly to enlighten the Nigerian Populace on the goings on in the polity.

The knowledge and exposure experienced by the citizens through objective media productions has constantly given confidence to many and prepared them to participate in the coming political election. Advertisements through jingles, and news items, both in the print and electronic media play major roles in the dissemination of information.

Poor communication can be dangerous at a time as critical as these last few months before the polls. The vivid expressions of the print media will bring about diversity of opinions and help to build

tolerance, mutual respect and stability.

We cannot end this section on the print media without mentioning the erudite observation of Emma Agu, group managing director of Champion Newspapers limited; "The media must be prepared to make a sacrifice for a better tomorrow because we cannot afford to be complacent and we must vigorously enlighten the people.

The Role of the Church

Before now, the church has been complacent and often silent on political issues for fear of victimization but over the years, it has served as a window between the people and God. It has played prominent role in the reformation of the society. Politicians seek spiritual and moral counseling, believing and trusting in the church as the last hope and anchor.

The church leaders who are described and seen to be as 'wise as serpents' are looked upon to provide guidance for the converts that come to them on daily basis through communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With the explosion of religious activities all over Nigeria even in the face of little deep growth in the Christian faith, people are called out not to be silent when things seem to be going wrong but to speak out. In support of this, an advocate, Ogbunwezeh in his article 'The Price of silence' opines that "the only thing it takes for evil to triumph and be crowned or canonized a norm, is for good men to grovel in silence and inaction.", he believes that 'silence amounts to a collaborative and quiet conspiracy with the evil that is on the wings of asserting itself over right and justice.', and as such ' whenever and wherever evil fights and claws to gain pre-eminence over justice and good conscience, the onus then lies on good men to rise resolutely in vehement opposition to it. Good men should never pretend to go to bed, or slumber in tranquillity, when the bell tolls for a decisive battle to be done to the arrogance of evil." {Ogbunwezeh 2004]

In contemporary Nigeria, Individual Christians like Prof. Joseph Obemeata, Bishops and Priests like Rev Fr Mathew Hassan Kuka have continuously stormed the air waves, especially the print media with the views of the church on politics and socio economic development.

There is a continued advocate by the church leaders, the need to fully expose the evils which bribery and corruption have inflicted on Nigerian society. Christians have also been encouraged to embrace politics and by being servants of the people change the Nigerian political atmosphere for better.

Communication in the church has been an essential part of liturgy and worship. Apart from preaching peace and love from the pulpit, the church leaders have also seen the need to get involved in calming the polity. They as such have written to encourage the rendering of prayers for peace and change on the political scene towards a successful 2007 election. Some examples are the 'prayer for Nigeria in distress' and the 'prayer against bribery and corruption'.

In addition to these prayers which are regularly recited in catholic churches, the church spends time in organizing seminars, exhibitions and symposium such as this.

Communiqué and Columns in the news papers like the Catholic weekly Independent, the Catholic Link etc are common. Other churches have also joined the fray by sponsoring articles and columns in the print media which disabuse the minds of the people on cultural and political matters. In all these, it is obvious that media is a vital solution to understanding the enablement for a peaceful atmosphere. Icons and church relics also act on the psyche of Nigerians. Such examples include objects as instrument for prayers like the rosary, scapular, statues and pictures of holy people. The church must therefore never relent in its effort to eradicate evil at all cost through these means.

CONCLUSION

As the upcoming elections draw near, the essence and influence of art, media and literature on socio political happenings in the country is glaringly clear. The various political groups continuously work towards establishing their goals and choosing their objects of focus and whether these are carried out rightly or wrongly, would only be expressed through the various art forms that appeal to our senses.

These will create positive change in the society by teaching values that will promote integrity, fairness, social justice and peace.

These are essential to the process of living together in a cordial political atmosphere. As we encounter art, literature and media in Nigeria, we acknowledge and uphold the power each package posses.

In all cases, the exchange of ideas help to build understanding and entrench reconciliation .Thus, the society becomes more organized shunning social vices.

ENDNOTES

1. Aka, E. 2000. *Regional Disparities in Nigeria's Development: Lessons and Challenges for the 21st Century*. University Press of America, Lanham, MD.
2. Alagoa, E.J. & A.A. Derefaka 2002. *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
3. Bret L. Rothstein , 2005 *Sights and Spirituality in early Netherlands Paintings* : 274.
4. Elizam Escobar, 2000 "Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom" in Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line, Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press), 246.

5. Ezechi Onyerionwu, 2006, Nigerians poly Military Music and popular culture.
6. Franklyn Ogbunwezeh, 2004, The price of silence, Nigeria Village Square.com.
7. Nketia, J. H. 1965, Music Dance and Drama; A review of performing arts of Ghana. Ghana Information Service. Accra
8. Miller, E. F. [1993], Building an Effective Church Music Ministry, Ibadan Baptist Press Ltd.
9. RAVEN,A. [Editor] Art in the Public Interest
10. Richard Olorunsola, 1977, The Anatomy and management of staff conflict in a Nigeria University Library, Lib. management Vol. 18 no. 7, : 328 – 334.
11. Stephen Osita Osadebe: Afropop Artist -- www.afropop.org
12. Umoren, R. 2001. Economic Reforms and Nigeria's Political Crisis. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
13. http://www.nigeriavillagesquare1.com/Articles/ogbunwezeh/2004_0

EIGHT

The Church as an Alternative Society: A Critical Examination of Ecclesiastical Structures, Leadership and Prophetic Witness in Nigeria Today

Rev. Fr. John Odey

1. Preamble

In the course of the few years since I started writing about the distressing political, social and economic situation in Nigeria, a good number of people have asked me series of questions. Some of such questions go like this: You are a Catholic priest. Why are you so enthusiastic and vast in politics? What actually captured your interest in politics? Why do you not concentrate on preaching the gospel message instead of writing books on political issues?

Most of the people who ask questions like these are politicians whose consciences cannot rest when they read my books or hear people discuss them. Each time the questions are thrown at me, my reply has by and large come in the following order: I combine my preaching of gospel message with writing books on political issues because of the responsibility placed on me by my vocation as a Catholic priest to speak for the welfare – both spiritual and temporal – of the people. The nature of politics as the ultimate decider of the people's material and temporal welfare captured my interest and makes it impossible for me to preach the gospel without linking it with its socio-political implications.

Religion is primarily about the spiritual welfare of the people. Its domains are the people's beliefs and opinions in relation to the existence of God, the worship of God and God's involvement in the world and in the mystery of salvation. Politics is about the material and temporal welfare of the people. It is concerned with the organization of the state and the acquisition and distribution of material goods.

As a Catholic priest, my primary duty is to care for the spiritual welfare of the people entrusted to my care. But the people we are talking about are not a dichotomy of body and soul (material and spiritual) living in different worlds but a unity of body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will¹. If those who are entrusted with the material and temporal welfare of the people are righteous and conscientious enough and perform their duty with the fear of God and the love of their fellow men and women, they will make the society good and conducive enough for religion to be rooted and flourish in the lives of the people. If they are unrighteous and perform their duty without the fear of God and without the love of their fellow men and women, they make life a living hell for those entrusted to their care.

When this happens, as it has been happening in Nigeria, it will be a very costly mistake for any priest, any preacher of the word of God, to keep on preaching about peace and love and about the happiness in heaven over there without saying something about the political conditions that make life miserable for people here in Nigeria and make it impossible for them to have at least some inkling of the peace and love we preach about. I firmly believe that the Catholic Church took one of the finest and wisest decisions when it barred her clergy from taking active part in partisan politics. But we are also aware of the fact that the Church never said that priests should not preach about giving politics human face and the milk of kindness. This is all that the social teachings of the Church are about.

When I preach the word of God and punctuate it with disquieting political issues, it is what I am trying to do. Given the pervasive influence of politics in the people's lives and daily activities, we do not need to think hard to understand that any priest who avoids preaching about politics in a country like Nigeria where politics has the power to decide almost everything about you and me from our tiniest toe to the hair standing on our heads will not succeed in helping the people to carry out God's mandate that we should

recreate the world and make it a better place where all and sundry would live and feel his presence and his love.

Politics has such a boundless and dangerous influence in our lives that whether we like it or not, whether we are interested in it or not, it will not only be interested in us. In fact, it will very often hold us to ransom. It has the power to give people joy or to hold it back. It has the power to decide how much those who are employed will be paid and when they will be paid. Should politics decide that the land on which our Church is located is taken over by the government and so ceases to be our Church's property, it ceases to be. If it decides that the schools our Church duly acquired land and built many years ago no longer belong to the Church but to the government, we shall have no alternative than to keep off, if only to save our skin and skull.

To sum up, politics has such an unlimited power over us that it can even issue a decree on whether you and I should worship our God according to our own taste or not. It is so powerful and so insidious that those who are armed with the power it bestows often thwart and twist other people's destiny as if they were God. In view of all this, I have the feeling that whatever offends our sense of justice should equally offend our sense of morality. That is why I am interested in politics. My interest in it is borne out of the desire to offer whatever little contribution I can to ensure that the overriding excesses of politics are curtailed.

To say the least, in the present circumstance, not even our wildest dreams could hope to make any meaningful contribution towards making Nigeria a better place until we have succeeded in making Nigerian politicians understand that they have no right to turn politics into a dirty game. We cannot contest the fact that what people have done or failed to do in politics is responsible for the general social and economic malaise in our country today. All these and many more account for my interest in politics. We cannot preach God in a vacuum. We preach God meaningfully

only in the context of the people's life and living experience.

Others have given me series of advice asking me to stop writing but to pray for Nigeria instead. One of such advice came from a fellow priest in October 2005, during the International Conference that took place at the Major Seminary of All Saints, Ekpoma, Edo State. The good priest told me something like this: "Fr John, I must congratulate you for your books. You have done a lot. You have demonstrated your concern for social justice and for the misruled people of this country. There is no doubt that. But, let me suggest the next thing you should do. Kindly, stop writing. You have written enough. Now, try praying. Let us go on our knees. Let us keep praying for Nigeria. Let us hand over Nigeria to God in prayer. He knows how to handle the situation. John, pray and stop writing. The hearts of our leaders have been hardened. If you write more books, what you say in those books will not change them. It is prayer that will soften their hearts and change them".

While I have no doubt about the goodwill of my fellow priest who gave me this kind of advice, I have tried hard but I am yet to come to terms with what might be the fate of the Catholic Church in Nigeria if every priest; every bishop and every cardinal decides to close his eyes and pray but says nothing about the volume of man's inhumanity to man that goes on in this country in the name of leadership.

I wonder, if we adopt the attitude of letting prayer alone solve the nation's plethora of problems, when a relatively few persons are turning Nigeria into a land of anguish and despair for the majority of the citizens, are we not, in this twenty-first century, repeating the errors of some early Christians who were so obsessed by their desire to flee this world and go to heaven that they made little or no effort to change their societies for better?

One of the Marxist attacks on religion, as clearly expressed by

Lenin, holds that it "teaches those who toil in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world, and consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven. As for those who live upon the labour of others, religion teaches them to be charitable – thus providing a justification for exploitation and, as it were, also a cheap ticket to heaven likewise". In view of this, Marxists dismissed religion as "the opium of the people"².

If we fraternize with those who turn Nigeria into a citadel of despondency only to fold our hands in the end to pray that God should come down from heaven and help millions of Nigerians who are victims of privation and oppression, do we not provide a fertile religious atmosphere for this type of communist invective to flourish? Do we not give the gullible masses the chance to think that the Marxists are right while we are wrong?

If we simply fold our hands to pray while Nigeria slides irrevocably into the abyss of self-destruction, can we dare look Jean Jacques Rousseau squarely in the face and tell him that he lied when he declared: "Christianity is a religion entirely spiritual and occupied only with the things of heaven; the country of the Christian is not of this world. It is true, he performs his duty, but it is with perfect indifference as to the good or ill success of his cares"³.

If we shy away from our responsibility to make our society a better place and take cover under the umbrella of prayer-alone philosopher, where do we stand to defend the Christian faith from the utter hatred of people like Emperor Julian who could have put an end to Christianity even after it had become the official religion of the Roman Empire because of his indictment that Christians were inclined to "brood their lives away, unspurred by all their desire is to renounce and to suffer that they may come to die"⁴

If we believe that the only thing we can do now is to hand over

Nigeria to God in prayer and watch our suffering people to see what would be the outcome of our prayers, what shall we do with the story of God's intervention to liberate his people from oppression as contained in the narrative of the Exodus: "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow" (Ex 3:7-8)?

Lastly, if we can call on prayer alone to solve the problems that our prophetic witnessing can solve, how do we understand, interpret and apply the conflict between the prophets of old and the oppressive rulers of their time in our own context? What shall we do with the incarnation of Christ by which the Son of God has united himself with each one of us in order to make the world a better place?⁵ What shall we do with the political undertones of Christ's message such as: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and toe the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free" (Luke 4:18-19)? What about his bitter confrontation with Herod (Lk 13:31-33) and the Scribes and the Pharisees who used their power, both religious and political, wrongly (Matt 23:13-32)?

I pray to God and write books about the man-made distress of our people because I do not believe it is right for us to expect God to come down from heaven and do for us what he has given us power and intelligence to do for ourselves. I do so because of my conviction that mahatma Gandhi was right when he said if he was confronted by millions of unemployed people who are daily degraded, who are devoid of self-respect and are devoid of faith in God as a result of their hopeless condition, he would rather "place before the dog over there the message of God as before those hungry millions who have no lustre in their eyes and whose only God is their bread". As if he was addressing those who feel that it

is enough just to pray and talk about a loving God to those who are subjected to subhuman conditions by others, he added: "It is good enough to talk of God while we are sitting here after a nice breakfast and looking forward to a nicer luncheon, but how am I to talk to God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread and butter"⁶.

The truth is this, that today, the Church understands better. A deeper understanding and comprehensive interpretation of the biblical truth, "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life", (Jn 3:16), reveals that everything, created by God, not only mankind, has a value that must be acknowledged and a right that must be respected.

In what can be called ecological justice, Pope John Paul II raised the consciousness of the world to the fact that God did not make any mistake when he made the different species of creatures that inhabit the land and the sea and that mankind has no right to destroy and annihilate any of the species. In his message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 1990, the Pope pointed out that there is a close link between peace, justice and ecology when he said that "world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life"⁷.

Since then, many theologians have continued to affirm this. They are reminding us that God did not make any mistake by creating land, water and air and by making them wholesome and that we have no right to pollute them. They tell us that while we have the right to use God's creation for our own good, we have no right to do anything that will cause an ecological disorder and disrupt God's plan for our common good. In fact, some of them go as far as telling us that the earth has the right to flourish. Ultimately,

they raise such alarm because the misuse and mismanagement of anything created by God has adverse effects on mankind – the crowning glory of creation⁸.

The criminal neglect of the people of the oil-producing areas of this country, the reckless pollution of their environment – land, air and water – their sufferings and the consequent social upheaval currently threatening the very foundation of Nigeria constitute a clear indication that the effects of ecological disruption have a lot to do with religion and social justice and that Pope John Paul II was not raising a false alarm when he spoke about ecological justice – that lack of due respect for nature through irresponsible plundering of natural resources is counter-productive and therefore condemnable.

In February 2002, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria lent their voice to the prophetic witnessing against ecological damage when they wrote: "Our fertile land and environment are being severely wounded. Rivers and streams are polluted, fish die, forests are despoiled, desertification spreads south. Refuse litters our streets because waste disposal services are practically non-existent. Oil spills and gas flares pollute and poison the environment in the Delta Region"⁹. This month, March 2007, the bishops again lamented: "The lingering crisis in the Niger Delta remains a major source of concern. Oil exploration has brought wealth to oil companies and to a few. The staggering cost to millions of inhabitants of the region, who are yet to benefit from the wealth, is a death-dealing ecological degradation and a gross violation of fundamental human rights. It is a grave sin that the Niger Delta, a region that has contributed immensely to the wealth of this country, remains a region of dehumanizing poverty, unemployment and a destroyed ecosystem"¹⁰.

Today, the Church is wiser and more attentive to the groaning of the entire universe and the yearnings of the people. From the great social encyclical Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Noverum* – 1891, through

the *Quadragesimo Anno* – 1931 of Pope Pius XI, the *Mater et Magistra* – 1961 of Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, particularly the Decree on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), the *Populorum Progressio* – 1967, the *Octogesima Adveniens* – 1971, the *Evangeli Nuntiandi* – 1975 of Pope Paul VI, and the *Centesimus Annus* – 1991 of Pope John Paul II, the Church has continually affirmed the inescapable truth that the salvation of mankind is fundamentally linked with the social implications of the gospel message. It is today self-evident that a Church which preaches about heaven over there but keeps mute about the social conditions that create hell for people down here will be discarded as a lifeless and irrelevant Church.

It suffices to cite only four samples, one from the Fathers of Vatican II, one from Pope Paul VI, one from Pope Paul II and the other from the Association of the Episcopal Conference of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA) to substantiate this claim. The Fathers of Vatican II declared: “The Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of both cities, to perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city, which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities... The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbor, neglects God himself, and endangers his eternal salvation”¹¹.

In his address to the Diplomatic Corps on January 17, 1967, Pope Paul VI declared: “The Church cannot remove herself from temporal affairs, because the temporal is the activity of men, and all that concerns men concerns the Church. A disembodied Church, separated from the world, would no longer be the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of the incarnate Word. The Church, on the contrary, interests herself closely in every generous endeavour which helps to set humanity on the road to heaven, but also in the search for well-being, for justice, for peace, for happiness on earth”¹².

In the encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II, declared: “As far as the Church is concerned, the social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action... Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress”¹³.

In a communiqué they issued at the end of their Plenary Assembly held at Enugu, August 25-31, 2001, the AECAWA bishops declared: “In order to accomplish our evangelizing mission in our sub-region, we, as a Church, have also to serve as an agent of social transformation. For by her nature and calling, the Church is a sacrament of the continuing presence of the Risen Lord, and His Spirit for the transformation of the entire creation”¹⁴.

Prompted by their desire to ensure that the Church in Nigeria does not shirk her social responsibilities, concerned citizens have put a Missiological Symposium in place at this great institution under the theme: *Politics, Social Change and The Church in Nigeria*. They have asked me to speak on the subsidiary theme: *The Church as an Alternative Society: A Critical Examination of Ecclesiastical Structures, Leadership and Prophetic Witnessing in Nigeria Today*. I wish to thank the organizers of the symposium for making me a part of it. I also wish to thank them for choosing a theme that truly touches on the lives of our people at this very critical period in the history of our embattled country.

With the 2007 political elections just a few days away from today, if there is anytime that could be considered most appropriate for the Catholic clergy in Nigeria to come together and discuss the role of the Church vis-à-vis the mind-boggling excesses of a relatively few people who captured the mantle of leadership in the

country by hook and by crook, turned it into an instrument of oppression and enslavement and are blatantly subverting the people's right to choose their leader and are making a mockery of goodness and good people in the land, it is now. I salute the organizers of the symposium for their patriotism.

2. Leadership: The Relationship between the Church and the State

The Church is a community of believers founded by Jesus Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit as the visible sign of God's abiding presence in the world and his will to save humanity. It is a community of faith, hope and charity through which God communicates truth and grace to all mankind¹⁵. It is a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all mankind¹⁶. Seen from a social context, the "Church is a servant of Gospel – a message of freedom and a force of liberation – which strips away and passes judgment on illusory and false hopes and carries to fulfillment the most authentic aspirations of humanity"¹⁷.

According to Catholic tradition, the Church is categorized in three phases: the Church militant, which is composed of the members of the Church of Christ who are alive here on earth and are engaged in the daily struggle characterized by the earthly life; the Church expectant, which is composed of the souls in Purgatory where they are purified by suffering before their ascent to heaven; the Church triumphant, which is composed of those who have been purified and are now in heaven. All of us here and beyond who are still breathing and struggling to survive the vagaries and vicissitudes of life are members of the Church militant. The Church militant is therefore the theme of our discussion.

Leadership in the Church is organized in a hierarchical order with the Pope as the visible Vicar of Christ followed by bishops and priests. They preside over the Church as the mediators between

God and mankind. They are thus the teachers of the divine truth. In a sense, they are human beings set apart by the virtue of their priestly ordination. However, the decree on the ministry and life of priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) makes it clear that they are set apart as a means of providing a conducive religious atmosphere for them to be "completely consecrated to the task for which God chooses them"¹⁸. It is through their preaching that the faith in God is aroused in the heart of unbelievers and is nourished. This faith makes the congregation of the faithful grow as stated by the Apostle Paul (Rom 10:17)¹⁹. The Church is called upon to serve as a leaven and the soul of the human society²⁰.

Our basic needs as human beings can be grouped in two – the material needs and the spiritual needs. The State is the supreme guardian of the secular good. Hence, it is responsible for our material needs. Though the State has temporal powers and exercises authority over temporal goods, there are, nevertheless, limits beyond which its authority cannot be exercised without causing communal friction. For instance, the Church reserves the right and the freedom to direct herself and her affairs without State interference. This freedom is so vital to the life and the activities of the Church that the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) described it as a sacred liberty purchased for the Church by the blood of the only – begotten Son of God. Above all, the freedom "belongs so intimately to the Church that to attack it is to oppose the will of God"²¹.

From the foregoing, it is clear that two authorities – the ecclesiastical and the civil – govern the human community. The Church is the supreme guardian of our religious good. It is responsible for our spiritual needs. The State is the supreme guardian of our temporal goods. It is responsible for material needs. Each of them, the Church and the State, is supreme and operates independent of the other. Yet, for the common good of the people who are members and subjects of both the Church and the State at the same time, they must operate on the basis of

mutual independence. The Church needs the services of the State and the State needs the services of the Church. The Church has no political or temporal power over the State. But she possesses the right to teach religion and morals. The Fathers of Vatican II summed up this communal relationship as follows: "The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political community nor bound by ties to any political system...The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. Nevertheless, both are devoted to the personal vocation of men, though under different titles"²².

It would have been an easier responsibility for the Church to concentrate on showing the people the direct way to salvation and on helping them with the sacramental requirements needed to attain that salvation through the shortcut. But the Council Fathers acknowledged the fact that there is social and cultural transformation which repercussions are felt too on the religious level²³. In other words, there is no shortcut to heaven. Those repercussions, be they positive or negative, often impinge on our actions and render the idea of a shortcut to salvation an impossible dream. Hence, the Council Fathers declared: "Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God"²⁴. This implies that while the Church and the State are each a "perfect society, supreme in its own domain", both of them should work together harmoniously to ensure the total welfare (secular and spiritual) of the human society.

If the body and the soul are not a dichotomy of the material and the spiritual but a unity of both that combine to make up the human person, it then follows that the soul cannot aspire for salvation independent of the body or the body aspire for salvation

independent of the soul. Similarly, if the body or the soul is tainted with sin, neither of them can be free. Perhaps, St. Paul's analogy of the relationship between the different parts of the body explains this best: "Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ...As it is, the parts are many but the body is one. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you', nor can the head say to the feet, 'I do not need you'...If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. If one part is given special honour, all parts enjoy it" (I Cor 12:12-26).

The body cannot say to the soul, 'I do not need you'. The soul cannot say to the body, 'I do not need you'. Nevertheless, to ensure that the social message and the commitment to the Church is not misconstrued, misinterpreted and misapplied, the Council Fathers warned against the growing tendency to "search for a better material world, without a parallel spiritual advancement"²⁵.

What the foregoing belief clarification is meant to delineate is the fact that the designation of the Church as an alternative society is not meant to liken its relationship with the State to that of the two ends of the magnetic pole where one is positive and the other negative and so scientifically repel one another. The Church and the State have different functions to perform. But since the primary aim of their functions is geared towards the common good of man made up of body and soul, their functions are often interwoven.

3. The Church and Prophetic Witnessing in Nigeria

Having been asked to make a critical assessment of leadership in the Church and prophetic witnessing in Nigeria, I wish to do so based on the understanding that giving prophetic witness entails, among other things, acting as the conscience of the society, the voice of the voiceless, the strength of the weak, the hope of the hopeless and the eyes of those who are spiritually blind. It requires telling the people what God wants from them in their

daily lives and activities. Depending on the prevailing circumstances, whoever embarks on prophetic witnessing is to encourage the people when they do the right thing and to arouse their moral consciousness when they go astray with the view of helping them to mend their ways. In the Nigerian context whereby the people's awareness of God and the sense of right and wrong are being threatened by political, social and economic systems that hardly make room for good people to remain good, honest, sincere and just, whoever plays a prophetic role must be courageous enough to make an objective analysis and criticism of the system and tell the people the truth.

Earlier in this paper, we pointed out that leadership in the Church is organized in a hierarchical order with the Pope as the visible Vicar of Christ followed by bishops and priests. Since the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) constitutes the highest rung of Church leadership in Nigeria, what the bishops do and/or fail to do, as a body or as individuals, constitute the primary sources of our assessment of Church leadership and prophetic witnessing in the country.

Consequently, it is pertinent that we briefly review the role they have so far played in the course of the nation's prolonged social, economic and political topsy-turvydom. In the course of the years, Nigerian Catholic Bishops have demonstrated their wholesome concern for the people of Nigeria. At the initial stage of their prophetic witnessing, precisely before the 1979 political elections, when Catholics tended to make room for unhealthy division between religion and politics, they called on people to take full and active part in politics. They said: "The man engaged in political affairs whether he be a Christian or not and whether he knows it or not, is a partner with God in the divine tasks of creation and preservation"²⁶.

In the Pastoral Letter on Nigerian politics issued in 1983, the bishops encouraged Christians to take active part in politics

because, as they put it, "we believe that the sacred task of providing food for the hungry, water for thirty, shelter for the homeless, schools and hospitals for all, can be promoted through active participation in politics; it makes them available on a large scale, through democratic structures"²⁷.

In February 1988, the Bishops asserted that right as moral leaders, to continue to offer their advice, warnings and constructive criticisms in respect of government decisions and proposals as and whenever they feel the need to do so for the over-all good of our nation. Furthermore, they reminded Catholics and others who recognize their religious and moral leadership that they have not only a right but also a duty to work for and ensure the establishment of a just and moral social order in the country. To do this effectively, they advised that good and honest people who had the inclination and the talent for political leadership should not hesitate to take active part in politics "in order to rescue our land from endemic moral corruption, political instability and unjust socio-economic systems and policies"²⁸.

As greedy, selfish and power-drunk as our leaders were, some degree of sanity prevailed among them prior to the ascendancy of Ibrahim Babangida who plunged the country into a very devastating political turmoil in 1993 when he annulled the June 12, 1993 elections believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O Abiola. The Catholic Bishops repeatedly and unequivocally condemned the annulment and insisted that the impasse it created "should be urgently resolved in such a way that future elections can be conducted and their results nationally accepted". They pleaded: "We call upon all parties responsible for the crisis to consider the misery of the people and the good of the nation, and to take such urgent steps that will bring the nation back to the course of stability, democracy and good governance"²⁹.

True to their prophetic witnessing, in September 1994, the bishops made it clear that Christianity has a moral concern not

only for the Church as an institution, but also for the entire human society and the entire creation and their problems and that the Church has a tremendous role to play in correcting the overall ills of the country. To this effect, they declared: "It is the mission of the Church to bring the gospel message to bear, not only on individuals but also on the social, political and economic structures of nations with the aim of promoting greater justice, integrity, love and peace among peoples"³⁰.

By then, Sani Abacha's plodding dictatorship had become full-grown. Consequently, the bishops expressed their dissatisfaction over the prolonged distress of the Nigerian nation and the misery and agony of the individuals and families in Nigeria who were unable to live worthwhile lives and fulfill their obligations and aspirations. They decried the widespread hunger and starvation in the country, which were made more unbearable by the fact that the country is so richly blessed by God but callously devastated by greed and opportunistic Nigerians. "Some Nigerians", they said, "are dying, victims of the prolonged distress. Some are thrown out on the streets to roam like lunatics, while others are living under sub-human conditions"³¹. Their appeal for a positive change fell on deaf ears.

In September 1995, they noted that the nation still subjected to ever-growing distress by the unmitigated greed of our leaders. In spite of the loudly proclaimed efforts of the leaders to make life less torturous for the people, they said that the situation was so bad that for many Nigerians, there was little or no energy left to even groan or complain as they kept hoping against hope. They lamented: "Apart from the privileged few, the quality of life of the people has continued to deteriorate. Unemployment and underemployment are swelling the ranks of the poor and destitute. Galloping inflation has reduced the purchasing power of even high-scale salaries to mere allowances. As a result, many feel forced to adopt all kinds of survival tactics with little or no ethical consideration. Meeting basic needs of food, healthcare

and shelter for self and family becomes by the day, luxuries available to only a few...we have spoken about all these national problems in the past. We shall continue to denounce them for as long as they plague the nation. We cannot be silent"³².

By September 1996, the nation's distress had worsened. This compelled the bishops to reaffirm their prophetic role as they declared: "The Catholic Church in Nigeria continues to identify herself with the joys and sorrows of every Nigerian, especially the poor, downtrodden and oppressed. Our mission is, to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour (Luke 4:18-19). The Catholic Church pursues its prophetic role with undivided attention. Like the sentry in the prophecy of Ezekiel, whom God commanded to speak to the nation (Ezekiel 33:1-9), we continue to denounce individual and social injustice in our society, which should not be construed as antagonism³³. They denounced the continued distress of the nation: "We continue to hear the cries of suffering, helplessness and despair of many Nigerians. In this country, which God has endowed with an abundance of human and material resources, Nigerians are faced with starvation and destitution of incredible magnitude...The nightmarish condition of the roads in this country, the armed robbery and hired assassinations make life extremely difficult and precarious for the people of this country"³⁴.

In September 1997, the bishops had a cause to remind Sani Abacha and his men that the distress in the land was yet to abate as it had continued to worsen coupled with the social ills of armed robbery, violent crimes, unemployment, official corruption, deteriorating infrastructure, incessant fuel scarcity, falling standard of education and health care. All these, they said, had combined to make mockery of the life of most Nigerians to the extent that they lived below human dignity. Seeing that Abacha was bent on subverting the people's political will and imposing

himself on Nigerians as their civilian president, the bishops tried to call him to order: “We, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, are conscious of our responsibility to speak on the ethical dimension of politics and governance. It is against natural justice and therefore unethical for a military government to take upon itself the role of an independent arbiter and be at the same time constant in the same electoral process. Such an action does not provide a climate that is conducive to free and fair elections... We condemn the activities of those who are actively campaigning for the leadership of the present military administration to succeed itself in 1998”³⁵.

When Sani Abacha died in 1998, Abdulsalam Abubakar took over the leadership of the country. In their communiqué, the bishops noted that that change of government “brought palpable relief to the generality of Nigerians and friends of Nigeria within the international community”. It was for them a veritable proof that the Prayer for Nigeria in Distress and the lamentations of Nigerians over the agony of the nation had not been in vain. But in spite of this, they made it clear that all was not yet well with the country. Among other things, they decried corruption in high places and the inexplicable fuel scarcity that had crippled almost all the commercial activities in the country: “It is disheartening that a nation which ranks among the highest producers of oil in the world cannot meet its own domestic needs for the commodity”. Similarly, their prophetic eyes did not gloss over the unnecessary creation of agents of public harassment known as task force³⁶.

On May 29, 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo took over the leadership of the country. As a result, the country was thrown into euphoria of joy that military dictatorship had eventually given way to democracy. The bishops were not left out. Having thanked God and congratulated Nigerians for their resilience in the face of the unbearable distress of the previous years, they said: “To sustain the hope of the people for a free, just, egalitarian and

prosperous society, every Nigerian has obligations to fulfill... The Church must continue to play her prophetic role of being the conscience of the society, the voice of the voiceless, the facilitator of dialogue and agent of reconciliation". To demonstrate how determined and ready they are in this direction, they expressed their "availability to enter into partnership with the Government in those fields that touch on the well-being of the people, such as the provision of education, health services and other social amenities"³⁷.

The bishops were aware of the fact that a lot of damage had been done to the country before Obasanjo took over the mantle of leadership. They were therefore slow at criticizing his policies even when it became clear that he made some obvious mistakes at the beginning. By the year 2002, it had become glaring that Obasanjo was prepared to adopt the sit-tight policy that has done great harm to the country. To this effect, the bishop warned: "Vicious infighting within political parties has led to struggles for power that sometimes result in assassination. Those in power seem to be prepared to do everything imaginable to hold on to power till death. The situation is worsened by the recruitment and maintenance of private armies, even by some political office holders". They described this state of affair as politics of power rather than development, which had turned Nigeria into a nation wounded people because instead of putting in place structures that heal and unify, it put in place structures that inflict injuries and divide the people³⁸.

Our leaders did not heed the advice of the bishops as they turned Nigeria into a mad world during the 2003 political elections. Later, we shall assess the prophetic role of the bishops at the end of that madness. In the meantime, let it be said that they expressed their sadness over the brainless rigging, fraudulence and violence that characterized the elections. They said: "We firmly condemn all fraudulent behaviour, violence and rigging which took place during the elections. Those who indulged in these irregularities

should consider what damage they have done to their conscience and what scandal they have given; they should realize that they are responsible for the ensuing consequence of bad governance”³⁹.

By the year 2004, it had become very clear to all honest Nigerians that our leaders were bent on doing things their own way irrespective of the hardship that what they failed to do imposed on the rest of the people. Consequently, in March that same year, the bishops cried out: “We note that the peace in our country is more of an uneasy calm than enduring peace. Political crises, social unrest, inter-religious conflicts and crimes, especially armed robbery and assassination, continued unabated. Insecurity of life and property continues to worsen. The poor become more and more wretched. Many go hungry and without good shelter. Not knowing their rights, they easily become victims of various forms of exploitation”⁴⁰

They went further to pick some holes with President Obasanjo's much-vaunted anti-corruption crusade: “Each year, the nation's budget runs into billions of Naira. At the end of the year, there is not much to show for it. Indeed, there is evidence of reckless spending on cosmetic and prestigious projects that do not address the problems of the masses. Many contracts are initiated and subsequently abandoned, or not executed at all. The economic austerity measures so much advocated by government are hardly reflected in the lifestyle of public officials. Many of those in power are often indifferent and insensitive to the plight of the majority of Nigerians”⁴¹.

In February 2005, the worsening situation in the country forced the bishops to recall once more the madness called election 2003 and the harm it has done to the nation. They said: “The tragic result of the electoral process of 2003 led to a situation where many occupy positions of power without the people's mandate. It is therefore not surprising that such people lack the moral and

political will for good leadership”⁴².

Having acknowledged the fact that the age of the youth is a period of creativity, vitality, enthusiasm and bold aspirations, the bishops decried the lamentable conditions under which many of those who have access to education study. In the end, they advised: “Government should treat our youth as the future of the nation. Nigeria is rich enough to feed and educate all our citizens, if the country's natural and human resources are properly harnessed and utilized. Unfortunately, crisis of governance continues to condemn millions of Nigerian youth to starvation, unemployment, and sub-standard living conditions”⁴³.

In September 2005, the bishops affirmed what is the mind of every well-informed Nigerian – that the year 2007 is very important for democracy in the country because it will give Nigerians another opportunity to choose their leaders. As the calamity of the third-term agenda threatened whatever little hope democracy had given the citizens so far, the bishops reminded President Obasanjo and the state governors that their stay in office would come to an end by May 2007. Hence, they urged the President to “use the remainder of his term in office to render a long-lasting service to the nation by leaving behind a more decent political structure that will curb the tragic illegalities and blatant criminalities of the past, as well as ensure free and fair elections”⁴⁴. They urged Nigerians to stand up against the syndrome of godfatherism and other dubious devices that disenfranchise the electorate. They advised the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to be made and be seen to be truly independent. They urged the electorate to demand an account of their stewardship from the past and present political leaders instead of complaining in apathy and resignation.

To President Obasanjo who has become so insensitive to the plight of the people that he did not care a hoot about the hardship of his economic policies, especially his never-ending increase of fuel prices, have imposed on the people, the bishops said: “Like

most Nigerians, we are worried at the incessant increases in the price of petrol and other petroleum products. Every such increase causes untold hardship to the vast majority of our people who live at or below the poverty line...it is unacceptable that Nigeria, the sixth highest producer of crude oil in the world, cannot refine enough of its oil for the use of its citizens”⁴⁵. They advised the Federal Government to put all the nation's refineries in order to reduce our dependence on imported products and the suffering of people.

In March 2006, the bishops cried out once more that the nation was still in distress. They said: “...the experiences of Nigerians have not matched their expectation. Nigerians are still in dire need of stable electricity supply, clean drinking water, and more good roads. Insecurity of life and property makes citizens live in fear and scares visitors, investors and tourists away from our land. The scourge of poverty is still with us despite the indices of economic growth with which we are presented”⁴⁶. They once more spoke against the dangers of the third-term agenda. After weighing all the lies told by those who sponsored it, the bishops warned: “Even if a third term is made legal through a constitutional amendment process, those presently in power should consider whether it is ethical for them to change the rules to their advantage midway in the game”⁴⁷.

They beckoned on Christian hope as a source of their courage to speak for the good of all: “If hope is not illusory and deceitful, it has to be based on truth. We cannot offer hope if we do not speak the truth. While 'the just ordering of society and the state is a central responsibility of politics', we cannot stand aside when the dignity of God's children is being trampled upon. That is why we insist that ethics and morality must never be divorced from politics. We would be failing in our mission if we do not speak and teach to direct the hearts and minds of the citizens to shun evil and do good in order to usher in development and lasting prosperity. It is to sustain true hope that we speak as Catholic Bishops of

Nigeria”⁴⁸.

In their latest communiqué, the bishops once more expressed a grave concern over the 2007 political elections. Recalling the bitter experiences the nation has had in the past elections in the country, they felt that Nigerians have good reasons to enter the current season of elections with heightened trepidation and wondered if the 2007 elections would be different. They expressed some doubts about the preparedness of the security agencies and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to help and make the elections free and fair. They asked: “If the political parties are incapable or unwilling to conduct credible primary elections, what guarantee have Nigerians that the April 2007 elections will be credible”⁴⁹.

They pointed out that the major cause of the nation's electoral crimes and perennial distress “is the belief that politics is about the acquisition of wealth, of oil wealth, by the political office holder”. This has in turn given rise to the curious paradox whereby Nigeria is rich but the people are poor. They concluded: “That a country of great abundance is inhabited by people who labour under dehumanizing deprivation in the land. But they have concern”⁵⁰. The bishops lauded the Government effort to fight against corruption in the land. But they have reservations with regard to the gross disrespect for law and order by the government and some government officials. They said: “Any government that professes to fight corruption sets for itself the high ideal of fighting injustice. Any government that professes to fight injustice must itself be just. Prompt obedience to court orders is a requirement of justice. When the courts of the land are disrespected, peace and stability can no longer be guarantee. We appeal to government and its agents to respect the judiciary, while we urge the judiciary to dispense justice promptly and without fear or favour”⁵¹.

In the final analysis, we can sum up the prophetic message of the

bishops in the following words of theirs: "There are some basic principles of social morality that must underpin the political life of a nation if it is ever to have a chance to be truly great. These include concern for the rights of others, especially of the weakest in the society, access to justice for all, political leadership as sincere service of the people, honest and responsible administration of the common resources of the nation, and a climate of decent behavior that encourages hard work and makes it difficult and risky to be dishonest. This is not demanding for a nation of saints; every country has its fair share of dishonest and lazy people. But when a nation rewards indolence, indiscipline and dishonesty, and seems to punish those who try to be decent in public life, it has no hope of ever becoming great"⁵².

It suffices to say that all we have said so far about the Catholic Bishop's role as far as prophetic witnessing is concerned merely touches on the tip of the iceberg. There is hardly any aspect of the life of the citizens which touches on collective moral responsibility, peaceful co-existence and the progress of the life of the citizens which failed to deal with. They spoke about the need to embark on qualitative and functional education, the government take-over of schools and the menace of cultism in our educational institutions. They spoke about the proper use of the mass media, sexuality education and morality, the HIV pandemic, abortion/contraceptive and the culture of death and the defence and promotion of life and family. They spoke about the abuse of religion and religious violence, particularly killing of God's name, the Sharia controversy and the secularity of the Nigerian State, Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the D-8 Group, the discriminatory and lopsided approval for land allocations in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, the intensification of ecumenical dialogue and the misgiving inherent in withholding information about ethnic and religious affiliations in the recently concluded national census. They spoke about the squalid condition of Nigeria prisons, the dignity and the rights of women, the problem of brain

drain and the predicaments of Nigerian students studying overseas. They spoke about debt cancellation and Nigeria's relation with the international community and so forth.

To crown it all, the most fundamental and far-reaching contribution the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have made in their role of prophetic witnessing in the country is the establishment of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC). If nothing else, the clergy and the lay people who are entrusted with the special responsibility of bringing the message of justice, development and peace to the unjust, underdeveloped and hostile nation and to our deprived, hungry and distressed people have done a lot by way of helping the people to know their rights even if they have not got the wherewithal to claim them. Millions of our people who have been touched by the tremendous efforts of the JDPC now have reasons to live and to hope for a better tomorrow in spite of all the odds staked against them.

A good number of individual bishops and priests have, at great risks to their lives, taken it upon themselves to play the prophetic role of challenging the excesses of our leaders by calling them to order and by conscientising the people to stand for their rights. The present Conference is one among many of such efforts. We are here in Enugu. Many of us are familiar with the laudable efforts, which the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP) has been making in this direction. Certainly, as far as transforming the social, political and economic climate of Nigeria in order to ensure a better place for every Nigerian is concerned, the Church has no rivals.

4. The Church and the Challenge of the Madness Called Election 2003

With the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria as her foremost mouthpiece, the Church, guided by the spirit of the Lord, has

indisputably been making gallant strides in her prophetic mission to bring good news to millions of Nigerians impoverished by their leaders, to proclaim liberty to millions of Nigerians incarcerated by their leaders and to set free millions of Nigerians downtrodden by the leaders. In this respect, the Church deserves to be commended.

But all these notwithstanding, some years ago, Rev. Fr. George Ehusani published his book: *A Prophetic Church*. In that book, he made an impressive discourse on the social teachings of the universal Church and on the great role the Catholic Church in Nigeria has been playing as an instrument of social and political transformation by calling our leaders and other architects of our socio-political and economic calamities to order. In particular, Ehusani noted that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has made statements that are no less prophetic than those of other prophets any time and anywhere. In their communiqués and other public statements, the bishops have clearly and courageously demonstrated their solidarity with the poor and the oppressed people of Nigeria. On the basis of this, Ehusani argued that the Nigerian Church could hardly be faulted in her social teaching, which derives from an enlightened reading of the *signs of the time*⁵³.

On the other hand, Ehusani expressed dissatisfaction with the Church's lack of practical involvement in the process of social transformation in Nigeria when he said: "What is clear to many however is that the Church's participation in social transformation has remained in large measure on the level of social analysis that is unaccompanied by social action, except of course that type of action that is equivalent to providing succour to the oppressed while letting the oppressor go free to continue his exploits"⁵⁴. He contended that as prophetic as the Bishops' statements might be, "when it comes to prophetic confrontation with unjust social structures, when it comes to challenges the evil status quo, the social teaching of the Church does not seem to

have taken flesh in the Nigerian context...because the public statements of the hierarchy have remained largely on the level of pious exhortations, passionate appeals, and benign denunciations, but lacking the practical gestures of solidarity with the oppressed and distraught with the oppressor”⁵⁵.

As a result of the failure of the Church leadership to confront those who make life difficult for others with prophetic anger, Ehusani was of the opinion that “a number of people are beginning to wonder if the hierarchy of the Church is not an accomplice in the grand design to impoverish, subjugate and oppress the Nigerian people. A number of people are beginning to accuse the Church of hypocrisy. A number of people have lost confidence in the capacity of the Church to lead Nigerians in the struggle for freedom.

In his conclusion, Ehusani advocated for an appreciation of the prophetic mission of the Church as the most credible alternative that can give some hope to an oppressed and distressed people in a country that had been rendered comatose by the misdeeds of her leaders. He said: “Until some Church leaders in Nigeria are ready to pay the price for truth that prophets and visionaries of all ages have had to pay, the 'powerful pronouncements' of the Church on issues of social justice shall remain on the level of rhetoric and no more”⁵⁷.

If Ehusani analysis of the Church is anything to go by, we can now draw the conclusion that there is no gainsaying the fact that the Church hierarchy in Nigeria has been forceful in condemning the spate of leadership violence and corruption in the country in terms of pronouncements. The Church in Nigeria has not surrendered its holiness and prophetic mission in terms of pronouncements. It has not lost its moral leadership in terms of pronouncements. It has continued to uphold the highest morals and religious truth that the faithful aspire for in Nigeria in terms of pronouncements. By words, the Church has acknowledged the

very fact that she cannot thrive while the society decays and has therefore identified with the crisis of the society as her own crisis. Nevertheless, in practical terms, the Church still lacks the type of prophetic fervour and the dynamics of freedom that inexorably lead to the Golgotha and then become a ransom for others. In other words, the situation in the country has reached a stage where it is no longer enough to preach powerful sermons, make powerful public statements or write powerful communiqués alone. All these are indispensable. But unless they are supported with some concrete action, such as a well-organized non-violent mass resistance against some of the excesses of our leaders, they will truly remain "pious and sanctimonious sermons".

Ehusani published his book in 1996 when Sani Abacha's goon were killing many people, compelling many others to flee the country to save their skulls and had turned Nigeria into a large prison yard. After reading the book, I was inspired to write the following in my own book, *Active Nonviolent Resistance: The Moral and Political Power of the Oppressed*: "Each time I think about so many people who have so far been incarcerated by successive military regimes in this country I have always been inclined to think that the clergy is lacking in their prophetic role of addressing in concrete terms the root cause of our people's suffering. I have always been inclined to think that, at a time when the clergy should have stood firmly, but nonviolently, with the suffering masses to resist military oppression and leadership corruption in this country, lay people took over from them the prophetic role, which they are better trained to play. To be precise, the question is: Why is it that there are so many Nigerians in detention, in jail and in exile as a result of their attempt to resist the oppression of fellow Nigerians... by the military, but there are so far no clergy man among those prisoners of conscience?

"Have the clergy not been touched because of the sacrosanctity of their persons and ministry, or because their failure to act when they should have taken active part in the process of liberation has made them so friendly and so harmless to the oppressors that

there is no need to go after them? Or, let us put it this way: In the midst of the misery, gloom and despondency that majority of Nigerians are currently going through, in a situation whereby all the people who have in one way or the other taken some concrete steps to stem the tide of total self-destruction by calling the military to order in this country are either incarcerated or driven into exile, in a situation whereby we watch top military officers and almost every person in leadership position in this country plundering and sharing our national resources as people share a booty, in a situation whereby innocent Nigerians are subjected to the most unbearable degree of assault, harassment, intimidation and extortion by all the different categories of security agents, in a situation whereby workers are not paid their salaries for months on end while some cows of Bashan make great fortunes out of the money meant for their salaries, in a situation whereby a whole nation is forced into an unimaginable degree of distress by the arrant greed of the military and their sycophants, what must the clergy do?

“In situations such as these, will it be enough when the history of this country is written in later years, for the future generations to know that the clergy did no more than preach powerful sermons, make powerful statements and write powerful communiqués, but never dared to take risk as professionals, teachers, labourers, peasants, and many other lay people have been doing in this country? The Church in Nigeria will not be truly incarnated in the problems in our people until it is ready to take necessary risks, until it is ready for martyrdom where and when the need arises”⁵⁸.

Eleven years have come and gone since George Ehusani said what we have just recalled and since I made the statement just cited. After those eleven years, I am inclined to think that the volume of communiqués so far issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference have been falling on deaf ears and that as a result the Church should be challenged to adopt a more practical strategy for addressing the nation's many problems.

As we pointed out earlier, George Ehusani frowned at a situation whereby the Church's social action is merely seen as that of providing succour to the oppressed while the oppressor is let free to continue his exploits. It suffices to say that the Church to which you and I belong became patently guilty of this indictment immediately after the madness called election 2003. Prior to the so-called elections, President Obasanjo promised us that his administration was prepared to preside over the fairest and the freest political elections in the history of the country.

To achieve this noble aim, Catholic priests were trained and inducted as election monitors all over the nation under the auspices of the JDPC. I have since then kept the official passport that authorized me to monitor the elections as a relic of the evil that Obasanjo and his men perpetrated in the land in the name of political elections in April and May 2003. Out there at the polling booths where the elections took place, we saw that instead of allowing the people to elect their leaders, it appeared President Obasanjo and his supporters had declared a war against the people of Nigeria and in the process embarked on the most outrageous and wrongful use of our security and law enforcement agents and other dreadful forms of organized thuggery to conquer and silence the rest of us. In the real sense, there were no elections in 2003 let alone have peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections. Since then, the nation has been sitting on a tinderbox of precipitous resentment and political turmoil.

The priest who monitored the elections and saw the hell that was let loose in the name of elections, particularly the JDPC leaders, were still collating and putting together their reports when we suddenly heard from the blue that the Catholic Church in Abuja had declared the elections free and fair. To crown it all, a few bishops and a good number of priests went ahead and celebrated thanksgiving Masses for politicians who publicly and violently subverted the people's right to be ruled by those they voted for. Without underrating the prophetic witnessing of some individual

bishops and priests in the country who dared to confront the pirates in power with their crimes against the people and against the nation, it has to be pointed out that that statement and the action of those who celebrated thanksgiving Masses for the dishonorable election riggers constituted a deadly slap on the Catholic Church. They demoralized those who were prepared to ensure that the architects of that electoral disaster did not have their way.

What happened prior, during and after that madness offered to the Church in Nigeria a golden opportunity to stamp its moral authority on the nation's moribund conscience by swiftly and bravely arousing the people's consciousness to the volume of the electoral brigandage that was perpetrated in the land and thus rally their moral might against the force of evil that thwarted and subverted their inalienable right to choose those who should rule them.

It is to be recalled that in September 1995, at the time when Sani Abacha's evil regime had gathered enough momentum, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) exhorted Nigerians to insist on and refuse to allow anybody to subvert their right to be ruled by the tenets of the nation's constitution. They said: "It is not enough to keep saying that military rule is an aberration, or that every military coup is a treason against the nation...Nigerians, on their part, must learn henceforth to stand firmly in defence of their constitution against any subversion by any group, no matter how well armed they may be with our weapons. The experience of other nations has proved that it is possible to do so, even against tanks and guns"⁵⁹.

In December 1998, the bishops recalled all the crimes that the military committed against the nation and against the people, particularly under Sani Abacha. According to them, what was more damaging about the atrocities committed by the military is that in the midst of those atrocities the "civil society in Nigeria

basically stood dazed, waiting for salvation to come from heaven", unlike what happened in countries like Sierra-Leone, Equatorial Guinea and Burma with less developed political culture that could not tolerate such and so had people who stood up courageously to contest with those who thought that they had the monopoly of power⁶⁰.

The impoverished, miserable, frightened and traumatized Nigerian hoi polloi needed some people in a privileged position in the society to lead them in the struggle against our self-conceited leaders. Hence, I am inclined to think that what was uppermost in the minds of the bishops when they spoke about other nations where people stood up against tanks and guns to demand their right is the Philippine incident. The madness called election 2003 was therefore a golden opportunity for the Church hierarchy in Nigeria to enact something similar to that daring Philippine incident led by Cardinal Sin here in Nigeria and thus encourage the people to rise up against a colossal evil but the Church lost that opportunity.

As a result of my conviction that what politicians did in the name of elections in 2003 must not be allowed to go unchallenged, I wrote the book, *This Madness Called Election 2003*. In it, I said, "For this country to live in peace, the so-called April 2003 elections must be cancelled from beginning till the end and a fresh date be fixed for the elections. Unless this is done, I cannot foresee any prospects for peace in the country. Nigerians should rise up to demand this. It is our right. If Obasanjo and his disciples are allowed to be sworn in as our leaders on the basis of the so-called April 12 and 19, 2003 elections, our children and children's children will live to curse the day we allowed injustice on the largest scale to prevail in this land"⁶¹.

Having been watching with consternation the social, political, economic and even moral upheavals that have been rocking the country since that electoral madness, I make bold to say that this

statement is yet to be proved wrong.

Let it be said that politicians have turned Nigeria into a mad world. Consequently, I have the feeling that the Church must do more than what it has done so far to save the soul of this nation. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, told us the pathetic story of an unlucky wayfarer who became a victim of brigands on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. But the story ended up in the extraordinary bravery and compassion that were demonstrated by the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37).

However, long ago, during the great depressions of the 1930s, Walter Rauschenbusch, pastor of a Baptist Church in the City of New York, opened our minds to something vital about magnanimous action that is not readily discernable to many people. Without underrating the traditional understanding whereby the provision of succour is seen as the sole and the ultimate lesson to be drawn from the good Samaritan narrative, Rauschenbusch went a step further to contend that the afflicted does not and should not live by succour abalone. The afflicted certainly needs more than mere succour to survive and to be fully human. In his analysis of the practical implications of the good Samaritan's compassion in a world where millions of people have been incapacitated by some political brigands who hide under the cover of leadership, Rauschenbusch suggested that we should go further than providing succour for the afflicted and ask questions about who or what is responsible for their affliction. He said: "The good Samaritan did not go after the robbers with a shot-gun, but looked after the wounded and helpless man by the wayside. But if hundreds of good Samaritans traveling the same road should find thousands of bruised men groaning to them, they would not be such very good Samaritans if they did not organize a vigilance committee to stop the manufacturing of wounded men. If they did not, presumably the Asses who had to lug the wounded to the tavern would have the wisdom to inquire into the causes of their extra work".⁶²

When we apply this to our own context it means that in a situation where relatively few politicians have turned Nigeria into a massive political and socio-economic slaughter house with millions of Nigerians suffering from different stages of fatal injuries, the Church in Nigeria cannot afford to be comfortable by merely trying to heal the wounds inflicted upon these millions. The number of Nigerians wounded by the gross misdeeds of our leaders has become so overwhelming that the Church, an institution that depends on the people's generosity, becomes inescapably incapacitated herself when majority of those on whose generosity she depends are incapacitated. A Church that has been economically crippled by the poverty of her members cannot claim to be economically buoyant enough as to provide lasting succour to millions of Nigerians dispossessed and impoverished by our leaders.

Hence, that Church is challenged to organize some vigilance committee to stop the inflictors of such injuries as Cardinal Sin and his nonviolent soldiers did in the Philippines. You do not persuade mad men when they go berserk and go about causing havoc. You will either overpower them, get hold of them and chain them, or you must run away from them to save your life. No volume of communiqués alone will likely change our leaders because the lust for power and money has distorted their moral vision. On the one hand, the Church has no guns and cannot procure any in order to overpower them because it is wrong to employ a bloody and violent means to right any wrong. On the other, the Church cannot tell the rest of Nigerians to flee the country to save their lives from their leaders.

Prayer! Prayer is the Church's most powerful weapon against evil. But the very people who have turned Nigerian into a land of misery have hijacked and almost adulterated it by taking cover under it. Some of them pretend to pray even more than the Pope. Some of them have declared themselves born-again Christians.

They organize prayer rallies. They build chapels and invite clergymen to come and pray with them in their chapels. Often, at the end of the prayer bouts, they give such clergymen some "envelops". Ultimately, they use prayer as a cover-up for their crimes against the nation and against the people. In the face of this false piety, the Church can no longer depend on prayer alone to counteract their evil deeds. She must devise ways and means of stopping their wheel of oppression from reducing millions of Nigerians to slaves and beggars.

To checkmate the excesses of our leaders, I advocate that the Church in Nigeria should embark on nonviolent resistance against those excesses. And as we mentioned earlier, the nonviolent revolution, which toppled Ferdinand Marcos, the former President of the Philippines in 1986, is the instance that readily comes to mind. Marcos became the President of the country in 1965. By the early 1970s, he had amassed so much wealth for himself, sufficiently reduced the people to the state of grinding poverty and destitution and made the country so unsafe for those who raised voices of dissent against his dictatorship and corruption that both the Amnesty International and the International Commission for Jurists had to intervene by documenting the thousands of political prisoners in his jails. By the early 1980s, the suffering he imposed on the people had become so unbearable that there was a general fear of civil war as a Marxist movement in the country gained increasing acceptance and support.

On August 21, 1983, Senator Benigno Aquino, one of Marcos's most prominent political opponents whom the latter imprisoned from 1972 to 1980, was assassinated. His assassination was the last straw that broke the people loose. His coffin became the first occasion for an uninterrupted grief and monumental defiance against Marcos' regime as about two million people demonstrated their solidarity with the slain and their readiness to continue the struggle until Marcos had been unseated. It took another three

years of desperate struggle for the people's will to triumph over Marcos' dictatorship but it did triumph.

At the peak of the ominous cloud of violent revolution that threatened the nation, the Church in the country provided a better alternative by calling the people to rise up in nonviolent protest. In July 1984, a Movement for Peace and Justice, an organization committed to nonviolent resistance, was formed. When Marcos announced presidential elections for February 7, 1986, the movement undertook to guarantee fair elections. To achieve this aim, the members encouraged people who had been under a heavy dose of intimidation and repression to cast aside fear, reject government bribes and vote according to the dictates of their conscience. Cory Aquino, wife of Marcos employed all the forces of the state to reinstall himself as the president. This provoked widespread nonviolent resistance that attracted hundreds of priests and religious nuns who placed their lives on the line to ensure just and fair results of the elections.

At that critical moment, the Philippines Catholic Bishops Conference summoned an emergency meeting during which they issued one of the most courageous statements of our time. In the statement, they denounced the elections as fraudulent and assured Marcos that he could no longer rule a people who had clearly demonstrated at the polls that they could no longer tolerate dictatorship. A change was needed to ensure that the people did not perish under one-man dictatorship. But to underscore the gravity of what was at stake, the bishops warned: "We are not going to effect the change we seek by doing nothing; by sheer apathy...Neither do we advocate a bloody, violent means of righting this wrong. If we did, we would be sanctioning the enormous sin of fratricidal strife"⁶³. To ensure that the dictator was pushed out of power, they called on the faithful to come out to the streets to resist his electoral coup with nonviolent protest.

Subsequent to this clarion call, Cardinal Sin, the Archbishop of

Manila, swung into action and led the crowd of millions of protesting people who vowed to throw Marcos out of power by nonviolent means. In return, Marcos vowed to break their resolve with brutality, apparently oblivious of the fact that, when they are in earnest, nonviolent resisters could confound even the most vicious power. It was only when his tanks and armoured personnel carriers came to crush the protesters, who were either praying the rosary, clutching firmly to the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary or holding the crucifix that they discovered the impotence of brute force in the face of people who courageously but nonviolently demand for justice. Facing the sea of people on the streets, the tanks roared, jerked forward and backward for a number of times and eventually stopped.

In that decisive and tense-packed moment, people who had neither sticks nor pebbles in their hands to defend themselves defied guns and tanks. It was the sign of better things to come. The battle was over. The will of the people had prevailed without bloodsheds because they had justice on their side and were ready to die but not to kill. On February 25, 1986 Marcos obstinately went through the empty ritual of installing himself as the president, after which he fled the country that same day. Mrs. Cory Aquino became the president. That was the end of Marcos' dictatorship.

5. Conclusion

If the Church in Nigeria had the moral fiber to do to President Obasanjo and his group of election riggers in May 2003 what the Church in the Philippines did to Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, it is possible we would not have been insulted by the numerous anti-people policies, the volume of corruption in high places despite the much-vaunted anti-corruption crusade, the unprecedented level of poverty and insecurity in the land, the calamity of the ill-fated third term agenda by a man whose regime has rightly been described as a suicide government that is bent on destroying itself and the nation,⁶⁴ and the many other social, political and

economic afflictions that are the trademarks of President Obasanjo's democratic tyranny.

All the same, the madness called election 2003 has come and gone virtually unchallenged by the Church. In March 2004, almost one year after that madness, the bishops made a statement that could rightly be interpreted as an open acceptance of that particular mistake. They said: "We acknowledge and confess our mistakes, our slowness at times to act in favour of justice and truth, our omissions, our infidelities and our faults. We call on other members of the clergy, the religious and the laity to this interior renewal which gives weight to our common and individual witnessing"⁶⁵.

The Church should not bother about tendering apology to the masses of this country for keeping quiet and in some cases for being an accomplice in that madness. She should not continue to brood over the fact that she failed to act to save the nation from the harrowing repercussions of that madness. To err is human. And that mistake has been made. The issue at stake now is that we are here in the year 2007. And the 2007 political elections are just a few days ahead of us. In other words, the Church has another golden opportunity to capture and correct her mistakes of the past.

As we all struggle in Nigeria to save whatever can be saved in our traumatic situation, I dare to say that Cardinal Sin and his group should not only challenge us, particularly the Church leaders. I have the feeling that they constitute a model of nonviolent resistance and that if we have the courage they had, we shall go a long way in liberating our country from the shackles of democratic tyranny and consequent impoverishment of the masses, social dislocation, moral decay and possible disintegration of the country.

I wish to make it clear that by portraying Cardinal Sin and his

people as models for the Church leaders in a troubled Nigeria, I do not intend to assume that doing what they did over there here in Nigeria will be as easy as we have stated it on papers. It cannot be because Nigeria is certainly more complex than the Philippines. For instance, among many other obstacles, here in Nigeria, we have our peculiar ethnic, religious and political prejudices coupled with the general distrust among ourselves to battle with. Barely two weeks ago, a veteran journalist, Ben Charles Obi, Jr. aptly captured this grim side of the nation's tragedy when he said: "The intrepid press, human rights groups and progressive politicians only made mild protest against the electoral fraud because of reasons bordering on religion, ethnicity and self-preservation"⁶⁶. It is worthy of note that in this assessment, the Church's prophetic role, if any, did not even appear as a footnote.

And so, in spite of all odds, I am saying that the witness which the Philippines bore to the same faith which we profess, their well-thought out, systematic and unmitigated commitment to the cause of poor and the oppressed in their own land and clime should challenge us, encourage us and spur us into action – to do something concrete with the aim of making life less torturous for the poor of our own land. I am saying that our country, Nigeria, is now perching precariously on the brink of total socio-economic and political self-destruction because millions of Nigerians can no longer afford to feed well in a country that is supposed to be the richest in black Africa as a result of greed and mismanagement of our abundant resources by our morally bankrupt political leaders.

I am saying that the salvation of Nigeria from the evil being perpetrated by those who installed themselves as our leaders against our collective will have become such a great value in the process of our survival as a people that the Church leaders in this country can no longer, and in good conscience, shy away from taking the type of risk that Cardinal Sin and his people took. I am saying that oppression, poverty and the allied evils of President Obasanjo's brand of democracy have reached such a disquieting

magnitude that no legitimate and morally sound price is too costly to pay in order to salvage the situation and ensure the future of generations yet to be born. I am saying that if, in the process of trying to do something to save our nation and our people from the dungeons of privation and oppression, we get scared, imprisoned, hurt or even killed, we shall go to the yonder world in the hope that our blood will cleanse and purify a land that has been so polluted by greed, oppression, corruption and violence.

Finally, I am saying that so much anger has been bottled up for so long in the people's marrow that if the Church fails to divert the eventual expression of that anger into nonviolent revolution, the country may not survive the violent revolution that may become the inevitable option. A stitch in time, they say, saves nine.

ENDNOTES

1. Gaudium et Spes, 3; 14
2. Cf. J. G. Davies, *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 35
3. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1947), 121.
4. Cf. William Barclay, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, Vol I (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1977), 120.
5. Gaudium et Spes, 22; 38
6. Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections*, Edited by Krishna Kripalani, (New York: Continuum, 1982), 123.
7. Cf. Donal Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda* (Ibadan: Intec Printers, 1994) p. 60.
8. Donal Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda* (Ibadan: Intec Printers, 1994) Pp. 30-32.
9. A Committee issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for the Year 2002, held at the Pope John Paul II Catholic Center, Abuja, from 18th to 22nd February 2002.
10. A Committee issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Divine

Love Retreat and Conference Center, New Lugbe, Abuja, February 26 to March 3, 2007.

11. *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.
12. Cf. Dom Helder Camara, *Church and Colonialism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 175.
13. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 57.
14. *The Church As An Agent of Reconciliation and Social Transformation*: A Communiqué issued by the 9th AECAWA Plenary Assembly held at Enugu, Nigeria from August 15th – 31st, 2001.
15. *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
16. Ibid, I.
17. Synod of Bishops Extraordinary General Assembly, The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World, *Lineamenta*, Vatican City, 1998, no. 79.
18. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 3.
19. Ibid, 4.
20. *Gaudium et Spes*, 40.
21. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 13.
22. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76.
23. Ibid, 4.
24. Ibid, 42.
25. Ibid, 4.
26. Ik. B. Ngwoke, *Christian Participation in Politics: The Teachers of the Church and Nigerian Experience*, in Catholic Social Teachings En-Route in Africa. Edited by Obiora F. Ike (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1991), 204.
27. This Statement was repeated in 1998 in a Communiqué issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria at the end of their Second Plenary Meeting of the Year 1998, at the Pastoral Institute, Ibadan, Oyo State, from September 7 – 12.
28. A communiqué issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria at the end of their First Plenary Meeting, held at the Hostel Complex, Generate of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Sisters, Ikeja, Lagos February 23 – 26, 1988.
29. A communiqué issued by the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria held at Enugu on September 12 – 16, 1994.
30. Ibid

31. Ibid
32. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Plenary Session of the Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria held at the Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, Benue State, September 1996.
33. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for 1996, Benin City, 10–13 September 1996.
34. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for 1996, Benin City, 10–13 September 1996.
35. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria held at the Diocesan Catholic Secretariat Oyo, Akwa Ibom State, from 9th to 12th September 1997.
36. A Communiqué issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria at the end of their Second Plenary Meeting of the Year 1998 at the Pastoral Institute, Ibadan, Oyo State, from the 7th to the 12th of September.
37. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for the year 1999, held at the Sacred Heart Pastoral Centre, Jos, from 6th to 10th September.
38. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for the Year 2002, held at the Pope John Paul II Catholic Centre, Abuja, from 18th to 22nd February 2002.
39. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Assumpta Pastoral Centre, Owerri, September 1–6, 2003.
40. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the CHIDA International Hotel, Abuja, 1–6 March 2004.
41. Ibid.
42. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the CHIDA International Hotel, Abuja, 14th–19th February 2005.

43. Ibid.
44. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre, Benin City, September 12 – 16 2005.
45. Ibid.
46. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Divine Love Retreat and Conference Center, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja, March 6 – 11, 2006.
47. Ibid.
48. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Divine Love Retreat and Conference Center, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja, March 6 – 11, 2006.
49. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Divine Love Retreat and Conference Center, New Lugbe, Abuja, February 26 to March 3, 2007.
50. Ibid
51. Ibid
52. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, Benue State, September 4 – 9, 1995.
53. George Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church*, (Ibadan: Inte Printers, 1996), 99.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 100-101.
56. Ibid., 101-102.
57. Ibid., 109.
58. John Odey, *Active Nonviolent Resistance: The Moral and Political Power of the Oppressed* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1996), 99-101.
59. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, (CBCN) at the Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, Benue State, September 4 – 9, 1995.
60. A New Beginning: Statement of the Catholic Bishops'

Conference of Nigeria on the Political Situation and the On-Going Transition Programme, December 1, 1998.

61. John Odey, *This Madness Called Election 2003* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003), 70-71.
62. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, (Edited by Robert D. Cross, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 305.
63. Cf. Ronald Sider, *Exploring the Limits of Nonviolence* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), p. 63.
64. *Daily Champion*, March 16, 2006, 48.
65. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), at the CHIDA International Hotel, Abuja, 1-6 March 2004.
66. *Insider Weekly*, March 12, 2007, 23.

NINE

Diocesan Justice and Peace Departments and their Contributions as Agents of Conscientization, Education and Motivation of Christians for Political Responsibility and other Civic Duties

By Rev. Fr. Dr. Ikechukwu Ani

1. Introduction

Justice and Peace Departments have become one of the central organs of pastoral ministry in every catholic diocese in Nigeria and all over the world. This paper is not intended to survey details of the activities of each diocesan Justice and Peace Department in Nigeria, to present the contributions each has made to promote justice, development, peace and caritas in its area of jurisdiction. Rather we wish to cite the Justice and Peace Department of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu as an example to expose the importance of Justice and Peace Departments in the pastoral ministry.

As a point of departure, we shall first of all reiterate that the Christian conscience, the Christian person who is faithful to the command of Christ, must make an option for peace. We shall cite examples of people who even in the heat of war and hatred, opted and worked for the reconciliation that would restore peace. We shall then proceed to survey the origin of what we today call Justice and Peace Departments as official organs of the pastoral ministry in the catholic dioceses all over the world.

The Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP) of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu has put in place and executed programs for the promotion of justice and peace. We shall survey her activities to expose what has been achieved so

far. The closing remarks will emphasize the need that justice and peace should become a way of life of our people, so that they could effectively face the challenges of being a community of peace.

2. Christian Concern for Peace in the Society

“Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace to all who are God’s friends” (cf. Lk 2:14). This song of the angels at the birth of the Infant Jesus already gave a succinct description of the mission of the Savior. Indeed the birth of Christ was the declaration of peace on earth. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus gave a little elaboration on the challenge of his mission of peace on earth as follows:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, and God has anointed me and sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour
(Luke 4 v 18-19, Is 61 v 1-2)

Peace can therefore only be achieved through the Spirit of God who anoints and sends his followers to break down the walls of injustice and oppression, so that peace will take its right place in the hearts of peoples. Anyone who follows Christ must therefore cherish peace from the very “bottom” of his or her heart. A Christian conscience must, under every circumstance of life, make an option for the justice that nurtures peace. The Church as the Family of God is constantly challenged to do all within her reach to achieve the establishment of justice and peace among all peoples. As the Nigerian Bishops would reiterate:

“We cannot talk of or build up a true Family of God without charity, justice and peace. Our families, our indigenous cultures and indeed entire human societies would crumble if justice were not made the guiding principle and thread, which bind peoples and nations”.

Despite the centrality of the message of peace in the mission of Christ human history has recorded two world wars, and even more devastating local wars and civil strife. Yet, even in the heat of war, or perhaps because of the heat of war, the true Christian human heart would have a strong longing for the reconciliation, calling attention to that justice that would bring back peace. It is therefore not at all surprising, that during the Second World War, at a time "when very terrible things were happening in Europe" and human life was being destroyed, Pierre-Marie Théas, Bishop of Montauban in the South of France, was a courageous voice that decried the deportation of Jews from France. In a pastoral letter to be read throughout his diocese he wrote:

"I give voice to the outraged protest of Christian conscience, and I proclaim... that all men, whatever their race or religion, have the right to be respected by individuals and by states..." (1942).

One evening in 1944 Bishop Théas spoke in his cathedral against the deportation of Jews and of young French men who were being sent to forced-labour camps. The next day he was arrested and he spent several weeks in a prison camp at Compiegne. While he was there the other prisoners asked him to lead them in prayer and reflection. He chose to preach on 'Love your enemies' and suggested that they should pray for those who put them into prison. This provoked a strong reaction. The other prisoners found it so hard to accept the position of the Bishop. Bishop Théas was released a few weeks later and went back to his diocese, but that prison episode affected him deeply and gave him an understanding of how difficult and demanding true reconciliation between enemies would be.

The incident described above gives us a good example of how, even in the face of deep hatred and war, the Christian person opted for reconciliation, justice and peace. This Christian witness of Bishop Théas became the first inspiration for an organized Christian action for peace in the group known as *Pax Christi*.

The second *Pax Christi* source of inspiration was a teacher, Marthe Dortel-Claudot, who lived in the South of France also, with her husband and children. She was involved in her local parish and she was evidently a very prayerful person. During the winter of 1944, as Christmas approached, she found herself thinking about the suffering of the German people. She wrote in her Journal: "Jesus died for everyone. Nobody should be excluded from one's prayer." She prayed that Germany would be healed of the spiritual and moral effects of 12 years of Nazism.

In the 1960s the role of Catholics as peacemakers was given strong support from the Vatican. Pope John XXIII could not keep quiet about many of the world's urgent problems, and addressed such problems in his famous encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* - Peace on Earth. In those years there was increased public concern about the possibility of a nuclear war. The Vietnam war began, and for the first time, many US young Catholics were among those refusing military Service. At the Second Vatican Council the bishops of the world supported the right to conscientious objection and condemned nuclear deterrence. It was the next Pope, Paul VI, who clearly made a critical link between world poverty and the money and resources wasted on armaments. According to Paul VI, "Development is the new name for Peace". He also created the World Day of Prayer for Peace which is still held on 1st January every year.

As the Church felt continually confronted with the problems of the world that constituted a danger to peace; the need for a well organized Christian action for peace in the unifying Spirit of Christ became more and more urgent. Today we have the Justice and Peace Departments in every diocese to coordinate action in favour of peace.

3. Diocesan Justice and Peace Departments –Origin and Mission

What we today refer to as Diocesan Justice and Peace

Departments have their immediate origin, inspiration and mission from *The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*. Evidently it was practical concern for those who suffer from injustice in the society, the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, that prompted the Second Vatican Council to initiate action for a more involving and systematized role of the Church in the promotion of development, justice and peace. "The Second Vatican Council had proposed the creation of a body of the Universal Church whose role would be "to stimulate the Catholic Community to foster progress in needy regions and social justice on the international scene" (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 90). It was in reply to this request that Pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Commission "*Justitia et Pax*" by a Motu Proprio dated 6 January 1967 (*Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*). The Pope established this Commission out of the conviction that anyone who wants peace must work for justice. Two months later, in *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI succinctly stated of the new body that "its name, which is also its program, is Justice and Peace" (No. 5). *Gaudium et Spes* and this Encyclical, which "in a certain way... applies the teaching of the Council" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 6), were the founding texts and points of reference for this new body. After a ten-year experimental period, Paul VI gave the Commission its definitive status with the Motu Proprio *Justitiam et Pacem* of 10 December 1976.

When the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of 28 June 1988 reorganized the Roman Curia, Pope John Paul II changed its name from Commission to Pontifical Council and reconfirmed the general lines of its work. *Pastor Bonus* defined the objectives and mandate of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in the following terms:

- (a) "The Council will promote justice and peace in the world, in the light of the Gospel and of the social teaching of the Church (art. 142).
- (b) It will deepen the social doctrine of the Church and attempt to make it widely known and applied, both by individuals

and communities, especially as regards relations between workers and employers. These relations must be increasingly marked by the spirit of the Gospel.

- (c) It will assemble and evaluate various types of information and the results of research on justice and peace, the development of peoples and the violations of human rights. When appropriate, it will inform Episcopal bodies of the conclusions drawn. It will foster relations with international Catholic organizations and with other bodies, be they Catholic or not, that are sincerely committed to the promotion of the values of justice and peace in the world.
- (d) It will heighten awareness of the need to promote peace, above all on the occasion of the World Day of Peace (art. 143).
- (e) It will maintain close relations with the Secretariat of State, especially when it deals publicly with problems of justice and peace in its documents or declarations (art. 144)".

The Council envisaged that Episcopal Conferences and their Justice and Peace Committees or Commissions for Social Questions, associations and movements of the laity, priests, religious, seminarians and religious educators will spread knowledge of the social teaching of the Church, especially among those who can in turn make it known directly or indirectly to others. All Christians and people of goodwill, especially Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences, were urged to join or set up such commissions in their immediate environments.

4. Reality of Justice and Peace Departments in Nigerian Dioceses

From the information on dioceses in Nigeria supplied on the website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), we discovered that the Office of Justice, Development and Peace is given a priority listing among organs of pastoral ministry in all the dioceses in Nigeria. Although the CBCN website might not

have been duly updated, we would like to make some observations about the posting of pastoral agents for the work of justice, development and peace.

In most dioceses there is a Director for Justice, Development and Peace, and most of them are priests. Only in Port Harcourt and Sokoto dioceses do we have Religious Sisters occupying this position. In the diocese of Jalingo, a Brother holds the office, while Warri diocese has a lay man as the Director of this apostolate. Ikot-Ekpene diocese has a Development Coordinator who is at the same time the Director of Vocations, just like Uyo has one who is also the Vicar General. Ilorin diocese has one priest as the Chairman of the Liturgical Commission, as Director of Justice, Development and Peace, as Coordinator of Prisons Apostolate and as the Vicar General of the diocese. In Nsukka diocese, one priest is the Development Coordinator and another is in charge of JDP. In Minna, one priest combines the apostolate of the Pontifical Mission Societies with that of JDP.

We made the above observations about dioceses because the posting of pastoral agents goes to show the importance each attaches to the ministry of justice and peace, bearing in mind the peculiar situation of each diocese.

5. For Example: Enugu Diocesan Justice and Peace Department

Enugu Diocese was among the first in Nigeria, under His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. M.U. Eneja, to establish a Diocesan Commission on Development, Justice, Peace and Caritas on September 25, 1986. The young Rev. Fr. Dr. Obiora Ike, who just returned from further studies, was appointed the Chairman of this Commission by the bishop. On October 4, 1986 Fr. Ike, in pursuit of the goals of the commission, founded the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP) which has become the active organ promoting the mandate of the Commission and

going into research, education, dialogue, human promotion, various projects, among many other programs.

In the final propositions and resolutions of the Second Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu" (2001) the Synod Assembly reiterated the commitment of the whole diocese to the work of Justice and Peace. As stated in the Acts and Declarations of the Synod:

"The poverty, the disease, the hunger, the squalor and the ignorance of the masses of our people grieve us. We note the flagrant abuse of fundamental rights and freedoms of people, oppression and domination and the unhappy situation resulting from bad governance and political instability. We consider it tragic that a land blessed abundantly by Almighty God in human, material and technical resources cannot sustain itself and often that children have to die because of hunger and want. Poverty is not God determined but man made."

The Synod renewed the commitment of the diocese to the "preferential option for the poor" in pastoral and social apostolate. All parishes were urged and directed to establish Justice, Development, Caritas and Peace organs at the grassroots. All should with one spirit, work for the liberation proclaimed by Jesus Christ (Lk 4:16-18) and intensify the apostolate to the sick, especially victims of HIV/AIDS, the poor, the neglected, the hungry, the widows and all those whom the world has marginalized. Particular attention was drawn to the situation of some women who by virtue of their gender are treated as second-class human beings by their men folk, with the urgent appeal that every form of discrimination against them should stop. Parishes were encouraged to build nursery and primary schools, secondary and vocational institutions as means of empowering the people and liberating them from ignorance and material poverty. The Synod emphatically mandated CIDJAP to coordinate all action on behalf of the poor and the marginalized.

Reports from CIDJAP fondly present a success story in many and diverse areas of apostolate for the promotion of human endeavour for development, justice and peace:

i) Loan Schemes for Self-Sustainability

Through the financial assistance of donor agencies and local contributions CIDJAP has over the years initiated and executed several projects. 30% of these projects are now sustainable. Micro credit schemes and soft loans, namely the Small Projects Fund (SPF); the Grass Root Women Empowerment Development Education (GWEDE), are worthy of mention. The loan schemes are revolving and the recipients are growing from strength to strength. The Justice and Peace Farm at Ugwuomu has recently become a School of Agriculture seeking ways not only to sustain itself but also to extend support and expertise to local farmers in the communities.

ii) Educational Impact

In Nigeria where quality of education has continued to degenerate, CIDJAP stands at the fore-front to promote the intellectual emancipation of the human person and to fight against incessant strikes in schools. The training programs for men - the Oluaka Di Mma Vocational and Technical Training Centre - and the women counter-part - the Nazareth Skills Centre - are geared toward self-employment and personal sustainability. Most young people who graduated from these training centres, have good chances of getting employed by somebody or realizing a sustainable self-employment.

iii) Gender Issues

Guided by the Good News that human beings are created in the image of God, made in same dignity and worth, CIDJAP pursues equal participation of all peoples and equal opportunities and exposition without discrimination of colour, sex, age, religion, nationality, etc. The management of CIDJAP therefore ensures equal participation and involvement of persons in the projects

and promotes same as a viable option to the larger world.

iv) Youth and Children

Through its awareness campaigns, workshops and sensitization programs CIDJAP has provided direction and alternative options to many of our young people who lacked vision and mission and were near collapse under pain of frustration. Teenage Pregnancy and unwanted birth receive primary attention under the scheme for the Youth. Many displaced children, abandoned, abused and neglected by family members and society have found rescue and comfort under the CIDJAP umbrella. The Motherless Babies Home, caritas office, counseling and support outfit are full of success stories in the implementation of this agenda.

v) Attitude Change

Many of our people who otherwise would have remained unemployed, enlisted in cultism, robbery, pick pocket, "419" and other sorts of duping were assisted to become responsible members of the society. The story is also true of our young girls many of whom could have taken to prostitution and commercial sex. Empowerment opportunities offered by our educational linkages, skills acquisition centres and micro credit revolving scheme have influenced positively the General attitude of our people.

vi) Relevance to Health

The extension of primary health care and establishment of community health centres by CIDJAP have contributed in the empowerment of the life of our people, the reduction of mortality rate and rapid response control of many diseases especially the scourge of HIV/AIDS. There has been notable improvement in child and maternal care, reproductive health and the general health condition of our people. In many cases medical services are rendered at less than cost prices. Sequel to our health services, communities are now given more attention to the urgent issues of sanitation, care of the environment and support to the eco-

systems. Some villages have witnessed great health care delivery.

vii) Co-ordinating Activities

CIDJAP is serving as a secretariat and control centre for many training and enlightenment programs and activities. There are other coordinating activities performed by CIDJAP nationally, within Africa and internationally. In furtherance to this, it has carried out and is carrying out several Training of Trainers (TOT) activities.

The activities of CIDJAP are continually refreshed, energized and sustained through the guidelines of the Pontifical document "Ecclesia in Africa" 1995 (Pope John Paul II) which urge particularly Africans to develop an educational strategy that empowers simple people to take their destiny in their hands, promote economic justice for all, advocate global economic restructuring based on Justice, Peace and Community harmony, encourage just and sustainable alternatives in social policy and continue the prophetic, teaching and leading functions of the church in a confused and materialistic world to which we have been called to witness to Christ, in our neighbour. The goal of CIDJAP is to champion integral development, justice and peace.

6. Conscientization, Education and Motivation for Political Responsibility and other Civic Duties

For several years CIDJAP was also responsible for making Christians in Enugu diocese become conscious of their political responsibility and other civic duties. However, since few years this pastoral responsibility was made the duty of the "Politics Commission" in the diocese.

Conscientization, education and motivation of Christians for political responsibility and other civic duties became even more necessary at a time the Church had to stand up against a government that, with unimaginable impunity, denied citizens their basic human rights for a modest human existence in human

society. Not only that the provision of some basic amenities like water for the daily need, electric power supply, roads, security of life and property etc., were neglected, but even salaries of workers, especially those of teachers, were not paid as and when due. This caused a lot of hardship and tension in the society, leading to the death of many marginalized and neglected people in the state.

This hard human condition heightened the people's sensitivity for the need to rise up for their political responsibility in the society. The Politics Commission organized several seminar and workshop sessions for the enlightenment of the people. Many Christians became better educated in their double responsibility as citizens of the Church and of the State. The Politics Commission succeeded in training monitors of elections in the country. Most recently, the Commission invited all the politicians vying for positions in Enugu State to face the people and state their plans for the betterment of life for all in the State. The exercise was well attended by Christians and other people in the State. To say the least, the Christian in Enugu State have abandoned the long existing apathy of referring to politics as a "dirty game" and are now very conscious of their political responsibility as Christians.

7. Concluding Remarks

Through the apostolate of justice, development, peace and caritas, CIDJAP has succeeded in putting a lasting smile on the faces of many people in Enugu diocese and beyond. Many have been given the opportunity to be heard and seen and to participate responsibly in the society. The programs of CIDJAP have gone a long way to conscientize, empower and educate the people. The linkage with some foreign donor agents has helped CIDJAP to establish structures that are conducive to run enlightenment programs to promote the work of justice, development, peace and caritas. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a better set-up for JDPC work than what we have at the Catholic Institute for

Development, Justice and Peace of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu.

It is precisely this success story of CIDJAP that draws the Institute into larger areas of responsibility, locally and internationally. The saying goes that the reward of hard work is more work. CIDJAP has over the years developed structures that link up the work of justice and peace with so many other facets of life. Perhaps we have to contend that there is no area of life today in Nigeria that does not raise issues of justice, development, peace and caritas. The result is that the volume of work on the desk of this diocesan organ has continued to increase. Consequently, the Institute is not less in danger of wanting and trying to do "everything". However, it is our hope and prayer that CIDJAP will not be seduced into losing the main focus of what it was set up to do.

Closely related to the point just mentioned above is the issue of over-institutionalization. Looking at the activities of CIDJAP over the years, one would easily get the impression that the work of justice, development, peace and caritas is located just in something (in the institution CIDJAP) *outside* the people concerned with the Gospel of Justice and Peace. Indeed our Institute has come to be wrongly understood as a "depot of money" where people go to collect immediate cash for their needs. One wonders whether those who have been empowered by CIDJAP's justice, development and peace work see it as their responsibility to make the Good News of Justice and Peace reach their neighbors. Even those who benefit from the revolving loan scheme tend to find it difficult to keep to the terms of the agreement, thereby making it impossible for the loan to really revolve, that is, to reach others who are direly in need of it. How far could somebody working with CIDJAP develop an attitude of fairness, working for justice in order to promote peace?

The wrong understanding of CIDJAP as money depot is connected with the fact that CIDJAP has indeed been very successful in attracting funds from foreign donor agencies. This has really helped to alleviate the suffering of many in our diocese and beyond. That raises at the same time the question of the involvement of our own people in contributing to development, justice and peace. How many parishes have a functional justice, development, peace and caritas committee? Perhaps it is pertinent to raise the issue of how much the Church establishments in Nigeria pay their workers in the spirit of a "just wages for workers". It is to hope that assistance from outside Nigeria will not go to strengthen the already widespread attitude that our problems can only be solved exclusively from outside, that means by others.

May I conclude by making a reference to South Africa. Considering the history of the country, it is not at all surprising that the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) was one of the first Bishops' Conferences in the world to establish a Justice and Peace Department in 1967-1968 following the Second Vatican Council that was held from 1962 -1965 at which it was agreed that the Church needed to work for justice and peace. In the context of South Africa "Justice & Peace" has been described as a way of life based on scripture (and the social teachings of the church) for the transformation of society by committed Christians.

The basis of Justice & Peace ministry should be rooted in the message and way of life of Jesus expressed in his missionary mandate: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, and God has anointed me and sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." A Christian who remains silent and unmoved in the face of the tragedy of oppression, poverty and unjust suffering denies the

Gospel of Christ. Justice, Development and Peace works would certainly be empty, if they do not transform Christian people into those who, from their deepest heart, love peace and for that reason wholeheartedly work for justice

How can we make “Justice and Peace” become a way of life for our people? This remains the great challenge for Justice and Peace Departments in Nigeria today.

Bibliography

CIDJAP Annual Report 2005.

Gaudium et Spes. Vatican II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, promulgated by Paul VI (December 7, 1965).

Ikechukwu Ani & Obiora Ike (Eds): *Evangelization and Renewal in the Church of Enugu Diocese in the Third Millennium „You shall be my Witnesses“ (Acts 1:8). Acts and Declarations of the Second Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu*. CIDJAP Publishing House: Enugu, 2002; p.377

Ioannes Paulus PP. II: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. [To the Bishops, Priests, Religious Families, Sons and Daughters of the Church and all People of Good Will for the Twentieth Anniversary of "Populorum Progressio"] (1987.12.30).

Pacem in Terris Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty. (April 11, 1963).

Pastor Bonus - John Paul II - Apostolic Constitution (June 28, 1988).

Populorum Progressio. Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Development of Peoples. (March 26, 1967).

The Church in Nigeria. Family of God on Mission. A Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of N (CBCN) to Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful on the First National Pastoral Congress. [A Publication of Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria]; CIDJAP Press: Enugu, 2004.

TEN

COMMUNIQUE

From the papers presented, the reactions, debates and discussions, the following points came out:

Recognition of hard facts:

1. Despite her natural and human endowments, Nigeria as a nation is still very far from what could be considered a good mark in terms of healthy politics, good governance and positive social transformation.
2. The different Christian Churches in the country do not seem to have indeed recognized and appreciated their unique prophetic role to speak out in clear terms and language against threats to democracy and good governance.
3. The tradition of treating active participation in politics with suspicion or even with contempt particularly by the Catholic Church in Nigeria owes to a combination of factors which include the influence of the religious Beliefs
4. The Catholic clergy, which should be a model and motivating presence for the lay faithful are not sufficiently groomed through their formation in the art and science of politics.
5. Women are equal partners with men in the task of nation building, governance and societal change. But they have not been given the opportunity to contribute their unique quota to our society.
6. The potentials of arts, media and literature as catalysts for social change have not been sufficiently explored and satisfactorily tapped.

The Desire for a Transformative Change

Having recognized the above hard truths about politics and social change in Nigeria, a collective passionate desire for positive change was expressed. This desire for change was propelled by

the conviction that if this is convincingly and fruitfully done, Nigeria and the Church will be better.

Challenges

While the clamour for change is a real one, the participants in the symposium were not blinded to the challenges ahead. These include:

- The ability of the Church to sincerely confront herself and the powers that govern our nation
- The influence and the power of the African tradition and culture, especially as they concern given equal socio-political opportunities to women.
- The hard job of really convincing the almost self-defeated common Nigerian that something could still be done to save Nigeria and that he or she is an indispensable partner in this service.
- The difficult task of redefining ideals and values and setting them aright especially for the Nigerian youth.

Recommendations

For the Church to be really an agent of political and social change in Nigeria, she must have to:

1. Encourage and insist that people can be fully political and fully (Catholic) Christian at the same time. Thus, Catholics have to be positively encouraged to participate actively in politics (Active participation).
2. Teach and practice the fact that women should be given an equal opportunity to play leadership roles in our country (Equal Opportunity to women).
3. Come out to speak and act more prophetically in order to effect the desired socio-political transformation (Prophetic role).

4. Understand and make use of arts, media and literature because they are catalysts for socio-political change; for example establish TV and Radio stations (Use of arts, literature and the Media).
5. Educate the people more adequately to be patriotic especially in the election of their leaders (Education on values).
6. Be involved where necessary in non-violent revolution or resistance (Non-violent Resistance).
7. Be in constant and open dialogue with the State without compromising her dignity and mission (Dialogue with the State).
8. Be on her knees asking for the divine intervention in the Nigeria socio-political transformation (Prayer).

CONTRIBUTORS

1. Matthew Hassan Kukah

Rt. Rev. Msgr. Kukah is a Nigerian that does not require an introduction as such because he is a national and international household name. He was the one time Secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference, and also secretary of the renowned Oputa Panel in Nigeria.

2. Ernest Munachi Ezeogu, C.S.Sp

Rev. Fr. Dr. Ezeogu C.S.Sp is a Holy Ghost Father (Spiritana), an erudite Scripture Scholar and lecturer at the Spiritana International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu. He holds a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, and a PhD in New Testament from the University of St Michael's College, Toronto. He trains and directs Bible study groups. He is the founder of Verbum Dei Association, a Bible study group in Nigerian seminarians that promotes Catholic biblical apostolate. He is renowned for the publication of weekly homilies on his website (www.munachi.com).

3. Chukwudi Anthony Njoku

Rev. Fr. Dr. Njoku is a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri. He holds a doctorate degree in History of the Church and Theology from the Louvain. His articles are found in many national and international journals. He was the coordinator, Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society, and is now the Chaplain of St Joseph's Catholic Chaplaincy, Imo State University, Owerri.

4. Bonaventure Ikenna Ugwu, C.S.Sp.

Rev. Fr. Ugwu is a Holy Ghost Father (Spiritana) and a

lecturer at the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu. He holds degrees in Sociology/Anthropology, Religious Studies and Systematic Theology. His area of specialization in Theology is Pneumatology.

5. John Odey

Rev. Fr. Dr. Odey is a priest of the Catholic diocese of Abakaliki. He holds a doctorate degree in Moral Theology and currently he is the Parish Priest of St Patrick's Parish, Kprikprik, Abakaliki. He is a prolific writer particularly on socio-political matters.

6. John Nnia Nwodo

Nnia Nwodo (Ike Ukehe/Nsukka), a lawyer by profession and also a politician, has served the government of Nigeria indifferent capacities and at different times. he was one time the Minister for Information.

7. Bridget O. N. Nwanze

Ezinne Dr Bridget Nwanze is a Senior lecturer and the pioneer head of Department of Fine Arts and Design in the University of Port Harcourt. She is also and an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the Niger delta University, Amassoma, Bayelsa State. Dr Nwanze has exhibited severally in Nigeria, USA, Japan, South Africa and Thailand and is a recipient of many awards. She is the President of the esteemed Catholic Women Organization, Mater Parish, Rumuomasi, Port Harcourt. She is married with four children.

8. Ikechukwuchu Ani

Rev Fr Dr Ani is a priest of the Catholic diocese of Enugu. He

is a part-time lecturer in Social Ethics at Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu and he is full-time staff of the CIDJAP (Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace).

SYMPOSIUM CO-ORDINATORS

1. Rev Fr Dr Bona Ikenna Ugwu, CSSp. Chairman
2. Rev Fr Dr Bede Ukwuije, CSSp. Secretary
3. Rev Fr Philip Igbo, CMF. Member
4. Rev Sr Dr Sylvia Nwachukwu, DDL. Member



216
3. Regional Co-ordinators

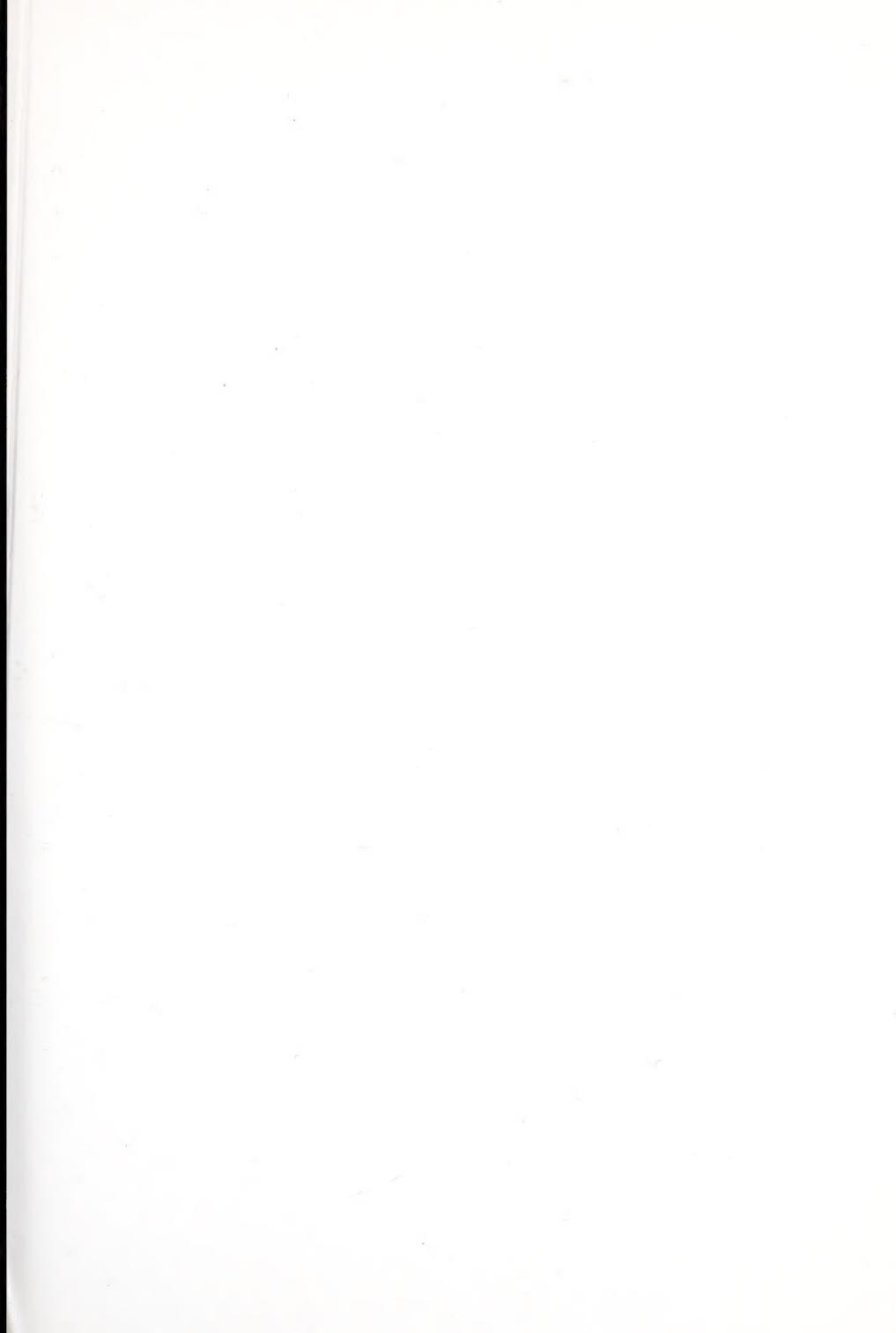
1. Rev. Dr. James Louis Urey, CSSp, Chairman

2. Rev. Dr. Ignatius J. O'Callaghan, Secretary

3. Rev. Fr. Pauline Doherty, Member

4. Rev. Dr. Sylvain Nampiaranu, D.D., Member

3 5282 00717 1864





3 5282 00717 1864

This book is a collection of well researched papers presented by a number of seasoned scholars and committed Christians during the Symposium organized by Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), Attakwu, Enugu on “Politics, Social Change and the Church in Nigeria”. Among other things, the book sheds light on the teachings of the Bible and the Church on the role of Christians in politics. It makes a critical appraisal of the type of political system and process obtainable in Nigeria today and suggests practical steps towards their radical change for a better result. Furthermore, it enjoins Christians to have positive attitude and to be actively committed to all matters pertaining to the positive transformation of society of which politics is very central. The book is indeed a veritable contribution to political theology, political education and political conscientization and is highly recommended, particularly for Christians who wish to know more about their role in politics and social change.